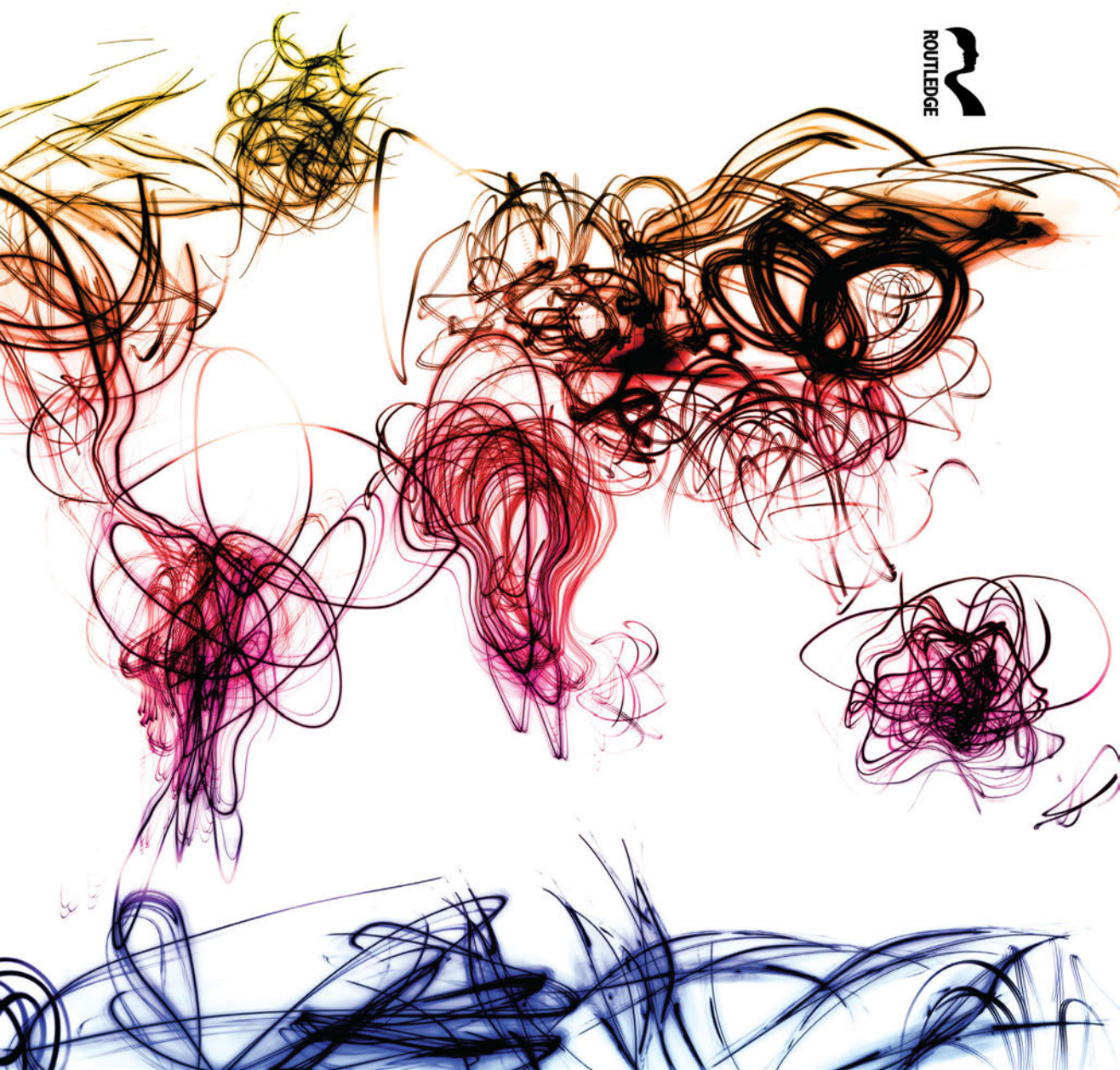




The Modernist World

Edited by
Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren

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THE MODERNIST WORLD



The Modernist World is an accessible yet cutting edge volume, which redraws the boundaries and connections between interdisciplinary and transnational modernisms. The 61 new essays address literature, visual arts, theatre, dance, architecture, music, film, and intellectual currents around the world. The book covers a variety of ‘modernisms’ from around the globe, drawing innovative links and connections to paint a picture of the ‘Modernist World’. A clear and detailed introduction introduces the terrain, as well as pointing out the plurality and adaptability of the area. *The Modernist World* is essential reading for both beginners as well as more advanced scholars in the area – offering clear introductions alongside new and refreshing insights.

Stephen Ross is Associate Professor of English and Cultural, Social and Political Thought (CSPT) at the University of Victoria, Canada. He has published widely on modernism and is General Editor of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*.

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First published in 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-415-84503-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-77833-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Saxon Graphics Ltd, Derby

To our families and in memory of Amnon Shiloah

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



As always, I am grateful to Ted L. McDorman for his unfailing support and encouragement. I am also fortunate to have a network of colleagues who have helped me to hone my thinking about modernism. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Carolyn Butler Palmer and Susan C. Cook for their camaraderie and advice. Finally, it has been a treat to work with Stephen Ross, a stellar and inspiring scholar. I would like to think that *The Modernist World* not only contributes to the ongoing conversation about global modernisms, but also offers a model for multidisciplinary collaborations based on a shared sense of purpose.

Allana C. Lindgren

I would like to thank my habitual lunchtime conversation cohort: Christopher Douglas, J. Allan Mitchell, Erin Ellerbeck, Nicholas Bradley, Adrienne Williams-Boyarin, Shamma Boyarin, and Gary Kuchar. Their questions and comments have been essential in my ongoing education in modernism. I would also like to thank Lincoln Shlensky, whose questions about what exactly I meant by ‘modernism’ several years ago pointed me in the present fruitful direction. My modernist colleagues across the disciplines here at UVic also merit thanks for their interest and support. Chief among those, of course, is Allana C. Lindgren, whose generosity, brilliance, and professionalism made working on this project a genuine delight. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Stephanie, and my children Kathleen and Adam for their daily doses of perspective, humour, and encouragement.

Stephen Ross

We would like to thank several people at Routledge. Polly Dodson suggested the project, contracted it, and supported us in its completion. Ruth Hilsdon was instrumental in helping us to navigate the process. We are grateful also to the production team that oversaw the final stages of the book. Thanks are also due to the participants in the workshop, which was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and held at the University of Victoria in the summer of 2012 in support of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*. Their insights into various aspects of modernism informed the original direction and

— *Acknowledgements* —

intellectual curiosity behind this volume. In particular, they helped us to see the possibilities that open up when putting different disciplines in conversation with one another. We would also like to acknowledge the additional funding provided by SSHRC in support of this project. Our research assistants Alyssa Bell and Katie Tanigawa helped us with some stubborn details and copyediting, particularly in the early going. Hayley Evans merits our enormous gratitude for her meticulous and thorough editing of all the essays. Her extraordinary professionalism has made this project much easier than it might otherwise have been. We would also like to thank our contributors, whose expertise and goodwill so enormously enriched both the project and our own understanding of modernism as a global phenomenon. Finally, we extend our thanks to the family of Amnon Shiloah, who gave us permission to publish his essay posthumously

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Diana Nemiroff was Curator of Contemporary and Modern Art at the National Gallery of Canada until 2005, and subsequently served as Director of the Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa. Among her notable exhibitions are solo shows of Jana Sterbak (1991) and Lynne Cohen (2006); *Land, Spirit, Power* (with Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 1992), featuring the accomplishments of a new generation of Aboriginal artists; *3 x 3: Flavin, Andre, Judd* (2003); and *Protean Picasso* (2004). She is the author of numerous exhibition catalogues and articles on the visual arts, and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

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INTRODUCTION



Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren

The reconceptualization of modernism is an ongoing and collective project. Until the end of the last century, Anglo-American and European writers and artists dominated the landscape, with the rest of the world reduced to a mere standing reserve upon which canonical geniuses drew for inspiration. For almost 100 years, modernism was confidently identified by scholars and critics with a handful of (mostly male) practitioners: Ezra Pound, Pablo Picasso, Tristan Tzara, André Breton, Arnold Schoenberg, Martha Graham, Sergei Eisenstein, James Joyce, Serge Diaghilev, Constantin Brancusi, Samuel Beckett, and Virginia Woolf. Reduced in its early days to the ‘men of 1914’, it was later reduced even further to what Hugh Kenner called simply *The Pound Era* (1971). Not coincidentally, modernist studies lost their verve as modernism itself was increasingly isolated and removed from the expansive gestures of late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s academic and political cultures in the West.

But that was then. Fortunately, scholars of modernism intervened and the modernist century concluded with a dramatic reversal of direction in the advent of the ‘new modernist studies’ in 1999. Determined to break the confines of the stale caricature to which modernism had been reduced, scholars started working to restore to modernist studies something of the vibrant plurality that had characterized modernism itself – wherever and whenever it occurred. As Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz have so ably shown, new modernist studies began by reconceiving modernism itself in terms that consciously broke with the tradition of high modernism (see 2006, 2008). In this respect, the new modernist studies repeated the classical modernist trope of the self-conscious break with tradition. Of course, as Paul de Man and Fredric Jameson have shown most compellingly, though others have since elaborated as well, such a gesture does not rid itself of tradition (de Man 1983 [1971]: 166–229; Jameson 2002: 106–18). Rather, it invents a particular strain of tradition at the moment of its obsolescence, reinscribing it as the field on which the figure of the new takes shape. Mao and Walkowitz described the consequent expansion of modernist studies as at once ‘temporal, spatial, and vertical’ (2008: 737), indicating a new appetite to treat as modernist materials that had conventionally been excluded by occurring too early or too late (i.e. in the Western context, before 1890 or after

1940), too far-flung geographically (a category that overlapped broadly with that of occurring too late), and too aesthetically broad (i.e. due to restrictive aesthetic criteria derived from Western artistic practice and enforced as markers of value by Western scholarly practice).

If this extremely brief history indicates anything, it is that the trope of a decisive break with what we might think of as the immediate/distant past travels well, and can shift discursive levels with perhaps alarming ease. As he knew perhaps better than anyone, Ezra Pound was far from the first to demand that artists ‘make it new’. Nor was he the last. In fact, as the trope’s adaptability makes clear, the imperative to ‘make it new’ by breaking with the immediate/distant past affords a narrative means of identifying multiple modernisms across disparate jurisdictions and according to flexible aesthetics, temporalities, and geographies. The new modernist studies not only repeats Pound’s borrowed dictum, but reanimates it as well, making Modernism (with the capital ‘M’) precisely the past with which we must break as we seek out not a singular global modernism, but a plurality of global modernisms – a truly modernist world.

The result is astounding in its richness and complexity, even as it preserves a narrative coherence. Where once high modernism dominated, there is now a plethora of modernisms: Chinese modernism, Indonesian modernism, Arab modernism, Indian modernism, Russian modernism, Irish modernism, Canadian modernism – and each of these comprises multiple further modernisms as well. Likewise, though literature has long held sway as the focal point of modernist cultural production – at least in the published record – sharing the spotlight from time to time with the visual arts (though almost exclusively in the Anglo-Euro-American context), the interdisciplinary thrust of the last 20 years has seen committed efforts to understand modernism in the fullness of its varied expressions across dance, film, architecture, music, poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, design, advertising, theatre, drama, performance, inter-arts practice, and so forth. Events like wars, world’s fairs, travelling exhibitions, riots, sporting events, the Olympic Games, suffrage, decolonization, and so on, have similarly found their way into the scholarly consciousness that once valorized modernism for the splendid isolation of its artifacts from the *Sturm und Drang* of mass culture and the sordid messiness of history.

The result of this shift in critical consciousness and attention to modernism has been a proliferation of scholarly research and public interest in a wide range of new directions. The number of books published on modernism has grown massively, while films like *Midnight in Paris*; travelling exhibitions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum’s ‘Designing a New World, 1914–39’ and Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton’s vorticism exhibition; the small-screen adaptation of Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*; and reconstructions of modernist productions such as Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, which was originally choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky for the Ballets Russes, all attest to the general enthusiasm for the period and its cultural output. Decades after it was initially pronounced dead, modernism is more vibrant than ever.

Perhaps the most contested and yet vital aspect of this renovation of modernist studies has been rethinking the existing terminology. It seems likely that disputes about terms like modern, modernism, and modernity will remain unresolvable in large part because they are so context-dependent. And, if we are going to take seriously the challenge to think plural modernisms globally, then we must accept a

shifting terminological, as well as conceptual and aesthetic, terrain. In this light, *The Modernist World* addresses the various ways *modernism* signifies across the disciplines and around the world, drawing upon Susan Stanford Friedman's illuminating catalogue in 'Definitional Excursions' and Pamela L. Caughie's *Disciplining Modernism* (2010). For instance, Friedman's challenges to reconsider the very categories of modernism, modernity, and modernization in 'Definitional Excursions' (2001) and 'Periodizing Modernism' (2006) were forcefully underwritten by her insistence on resituating those terms in relation to what had until then been largely subsumed under the banner of post-colonialism. Her reading of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* as a modernist novel afforded a powerful instance of modernism as something that not only travels but flourishes independently in non-Anglo-Euro-American contexts. We ultimately argue for the validity of *modernism* as a governing term that can invoke all cognate or parallel terms, and that can denote experimentation, critique, and self-conscious demarcation of a break with tradition (itself produced in the moment of the break) against the conservative definitions of modernism as elitist, totalizing, homogenizing, and bureaucratizing (chiefly in the social sciences, but with pertinent echoes in some artistic fields as well). These latter three characteristics we consider to be roughly synonymous with *modernity*. A note of caution, though: as Friedman argues is characteristic of 'the most useful definitional exercises', our definitions here are 'provisional, strategic, fluid, permeable, and situationally adaptable' (2001: 497).

In that frame, *The Modernist World* is perhaps best understood as an experiment in n-dimensional scholarly cartography. It does not merely map modernism around the world, but seeks to determine how the global orientation of new modernist studies is understood across arts disciplines and geopolitical regions. It brings together an impressive array of colleagues charged with providing overviews aimed at students and researchers new to the vast reach of global modernist studies. It began from a place of inevitable ignorance and insatiable curiosity: neither we nor anyone we could think of could individually provide an overview of modernism in film, literature, dance, music, theatre, visual arts, architecture and design, and intellectual currents, in every geopolitical region of the world. Contributors were asked at the outset if the term 'modernism' or an equivalent even existed in their areas of research. If so, we queried, what does it mean? What is its history? What are its priorities, biases, and ideological alliances? Who were its leaders and what were their objectives? Tellingly, no one answered that no such term functioned in their fields. Once we got past the conventional hurdles that identify modernism with Western aesthetic practice of a narrow temporal frame, we found a superabundance of responses. It quickly became apparent that the artistic activities and events corralled under the rubric 'modernism' are often contradictory in their goals and inconsistent in their periodization. To map modernism across the continents is necessarily also to map it across disparate temporalities, aesthetic regimes, and definitional schemas.

The essays collected here begin to do just that by considering the multidisciplinary and transnational significance of modernism. In doing so, *The Modernist World* serves as an introduction to global modernist studies, but it also intervenes in them by challenging disciplinary and geopolitical boundaries.

One of the volume's highlights is its championing of multidisciplinary. While the majority of publications about modernism focus on literature and the visual arts, *The*

Modernist World demonstrates the richness of modernism's textual, visual, tactile, kinetic, spatial, embodied, and aural manifestations and configurations. These numerous modes of artistic expression are not simply adjuncts trailing behind the development of literary modernism, as they are often treated (claims to the contrary notwithstanding). Rather, they have their own traditions, their own temporalities, and their own ways of registering the seismic shifts of modernity. Attending to them in their own terms is just as vital as attending to various geo-politically distinct modernisms.

Aware of the artificiality and contentiousness of geopolitical boundaries, we have nevertheless included contributions that outline the intellectual currents of each region to help readers to situate artistic activities within their socio-political contexts, and to provide access to the ideas that have triggered many of modernism's ruptures. Moreover, the range of geographical coordinates included here does not claim to be comprehensive, but – like the disciplinary expansiveness that defines this volume – broadens the scholarly conversation by attending to locales that until recently were routinely overlooked or relegated to the periphery of a Western world view. Modernism has been subject to the specific geographical and disciplinary conditions in which it has occurred; it has taken its variegated character from these conditions, and any serious account of it should be able to define their parameters.

As a whole, then, *The Modernist World* contributes to an emerging context of global modernist studies that blends the field's long-standing Anglo-Euro-American aesthetic focus with renewed (in some cases wholly new) attention to non-Western settings, post-colonial theory and criticism, and attempts to understand modernism as a complex product of multiple, reciprocal, contradictory, interacting – though also at times independent – developments across the arts and around the world. If doing so at least initially required us to structure the inquiry rather formally and to invoke long-standing Western conceptions of what constitutes modernism, we have tried to overcome the limitations of doing so by inviting our contributors – and trying ourselves – to erase, smash, and forget as much of that infrastructure and precedent as possible in tracing modernism's rhizomatic and opportunistic global contours.

In this ambition, we have tried to build on the work of several key antecedents. Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island* helped to illuminate the potential for thinking about modernism in terms of global circuits of exchange. Simon Gikandi pushed even further, consolidating efforts to rethink modernism's global reach, and laid the groundwork for the intellectual aspirations behind this volume (2006). Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's *Alternative Modernities* (2001), along with Walter D. Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) has established a powerful intellectual framework for decentring European approaches to modernism, modernity, and modernization. Their influence is apparent in many of the chapters collected here, and Gaonkar in particular is among the most commonly cited thinkers in many of the chapters collected here. Adding to this work in crucial ways that inform *The Modernist World* are Rajeev S. Patke, Chana Kronfeld, and Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon. Bringing the insights of post-colonial studies to bear upon artistic practice in a wide range of geopolitical regions and across a variety of cultural practices, these scholars provide innovative means of thinking through the conflicted zones of modernism and modernity. By engaging with modernism as a modality of modernity and modernization in complex, non-reductive ways, such work has made

The Modernist World possible. In short, the preceding scholarship has opened up lines of communication among various disciplines, regions, national cultures, and ethnic traditions, and let us imagine modernism in all its messy expansive fecundity.

The Modernist World owes perhaps its greatest debt to three key interventions in the new modernist studies: Laura Winkiel and Laura Doyle's *Geomodernisms* (2006); Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker's *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (2010); and *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), edited by Mark Wollaeger with Matt Eatough. *Geomodernisms* furnished an early attempt to consider modernism by decentering or 'provincializing' Europe, and is a crucial touchstone for the chapters we have gathered here (Chakrabarty 2008). It helped to establish the (sub)field to which we hope *The Modernist World* can contribute. *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* likewise laid important groundwork by taking seriously as no other such work had yet done the challenge of accounting for non-Western (or marginalized Western) forms of modernism, helping us to understand what might be possible if we adopted a truly open approach to the study of global modernism, and gave equal weight to any and all comers. Although *The Modernist World* attempts to cover more geopolitical and disciplinary territory, and positions itself as an entry point for readers unfamiliar with the scope of the new modernist studies, it nevertheless follows Wollaeger in asking

what counts as modernism when one starts looking for examples from across the globe? What kind of agendas might be encoded in the comparisons required by a global perspective? How does the effort to think modernism globally affect received time lines for the beginning and end of modernism?

(Wollaeger and Eatough 2012: 3)

Of course, we also had to beware, as Wollaeger goes on to warn, that a paradox underwrites the project:

we need to proceed as if we do not already know what modernism is in order to develop a truer account – even as (always the kicker) logic requires some idea of what we are looking for before we can start.

(2012: 12)

Our commitment to the 'truer account' and curiosity pure and simple motivated us to try to overcome this paradox, even as we never lost sight of it.

ORGANIZATION – AND ITS OTHERS

There is more than one way to navigate *The Modernist World*. We opted to order the chapters by regions to encourage interdisciplinary reading. Comparing and contrasting how Canadian and American musical, dance, and literary modernism responded to the pressure of Anglo-European precedents (see Cecchetto and Strachan, Lindgren, and Betts, respectively) provides a synthetic understanding of modernism that does justice to its habitual transgression of disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, the linguistic and cultural diversity of South Asia affords a range of adaptive strategies for

modernism across dance, music, literature, cinema, and the visual arts to which architecture is less amenable (see Katrak, Scott, Dharwadker, Sapra, Dave-Mukherji *et al.*, and James-Chakraborty, respectively). Readers are encouraged to reach out across disciplinary lines even if they remain within regional confines, to enrich their understanding of modernism as a genuinely collaborative and opportunistic cultural practice.

It is, of course, equally possible to pursue modernism in this volume by art form. As Rajeev S. Patke notes, ‘to become “modern” could thus mean very different things, depending on the context. This type of plurality is a function of geography: the logic that animates these modernisms varies from one region to another’ (2013: 26). Attempts to trace such regional variety are well served by comparing how different forms of cultural production varied – and remained stable – across various regions. Architecture, for example, seems to have remained profoundly uniform regardless of context, perhaps due to the immense challenges posed by its material demands or, as Felipe Hernández argues, due to its close ties with imperialist development policy (see Jackson, Rowe, Johnson, Windsor Liscombe, James-Chakraborty, and Bissell). By contrast, and in something of a surprise to us, the intellectual influences on modernist cultural production vary significantly from region to region, with the Anglo-European tradition exerting less influence than we had anticipated. ‘The general issue at stake is the need for a plural concept of modernism, commensurate to plural experiences of modernity’ (Patke 2013: 29). National and ethnic identity formation appears to have been a central driver in local intellectual traditions springing up in response to the depredations – and benefits – of imperialist modernization (in this line, see Macarthur, Bush, Gammel and Waszczuk, Oliver, Tagharobi and Zarei, Sorensen, Dube, and Mahmoud).

Moving beyond the axis of region and discipline enabled the discovery of several thematic intersections. Some of the contributions queried how modernism facilitated artistic questions. David Cecchetto and Jeremy Strachan see modernism playfully and productively investigating the types of expression that have expanded our understanding of what constitutes music in Canada and the United States. Other writers, including Juan A. Suárez, who also addresses Canada and the United States in his article about cinema, as well as Claire Warden, who discusses theatre in Europe, remind readers of the multiplicity of terms used for artistic experimentation that can be placed under the rubric of modernism.

The mobility of modernist engagement is another interest of our authors. Notably, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, Alan Filewod, and Diana Nemiroff – all experts in modernism in Canada and the United States – comment on the multi-directional transnational flow of ideas, from the influence of American industrial architecture and technology had on Europe, to the Russian and German precursors to militant workers’ theatre and agitprop in Canada and the United States, to the international debates that accompanied the 1913 Armory Show in New York.

Several of our writers emphasize the problems of categorization, which can flatten and distort particularity when divergent cultures are corralled into regions. Simon Soon’s discussion of visual art in East and Southeast Asia offers a corrective to reductive and homogenizing notions of a pan-Asian modernism. Similarly, in their article about the visual arts in South Asia, Parul Dave-Mukherji, Simone Wille, AKM Khademul Haque, and T. Sanathanan emphasize the distinct histories of the

communities they examine. In his introduction to modernist cinema in Australasia, Anthony Lambert likewise notes regional differences that result in a plurality of modernist creativity.

Modernism's long temporal span provides the focus for Jenny Kwok Wah Lau and Stanley Scott. For Lau, modernism is detectable in East Asian cinema from the early years of the twentieth century to at least as recently as the first decade of the twenty-first century. Writing about art music in South Asia, Scott demonstrates how the roots of modernism appear in the eighteenth century while more contemporary iterations have manifested as recently as the twenty-first century.

The tensions between binaries emerged in some of the chapters. Dina Amin's chapter focuses on the precarious balance between tradition and modernity in Arab theatre after 1950. Juliet Bellow and Nell Andrew, who write about dance in Europe, and Graeme Skinner, who explores modernist music in Australia, challenge established notions of centre and periphery by showing how their respective art forms – frequently marginalized – exerted influence on the other arts, thereby repositioning dance and music as quintessential modernist expressions.

The majority of the chapters broach the socio-political implications of modernism. For Michael Valdez Moses, for instance, European cinema was an active agent in the construction of the modern self. Amanda Card highlights the parallel trajectories of dance and colonial/post-colonial engagement in Oceania. Likewise, Gregory Betts outlines how literature in Canada and the United States responded to the most urgent issues of the day, including the Great Depression and the rise of fascism. Literature appears to have had a particularly interventionist drive, as Vassiliki Kolocotroni illuminates how writers in Europe were attuned to shifting political realities, and Vinay Dharwadker notes how literary expression in South Asia developed in tandem with the will for political autonomy.

The relationship between modernism/modernity/modernization and imperialism predominates the political concerns pursued in *The Modernist World*. Many of our authors added another term to this more or less familiar set of terms: westernization. Sometimes the concept was conflated with the aforementioned terms to convey historical or current artistic perspectives; at others, the association was strongly repudiated. Peter G. Rowe, for instance, notes that architectural modernization in East Asia often meant importing western designs and principles, even when materials varied due to local supply and plans had to be adapted to meet the demands of local – often extreme – climates. Saurabh Dube points out the extent to which intellectual currents in South Asia equated modernization with westernization in terms of development studies and the universalizing impetus of Enlightenment ideals. Jukka O. Miettinen argues that the advent of modernism in East Asian dance likewise depended upon westernizing it, not least for easy export. More intensively, several of the chapters dealing with the Middle East and Arab world, and with Sub-Saharan Africa, identify the link between modernization and westernization as a key element in how modernism developed in those regions. Walid El Khachab's treatment of cinema in the Middle East and Arab world notes that cinema itself depended upon Western technologies for its production and dissemination – and those technologies do not come free of ideological and aesthetic baggage. Kaveh Tagharobi and Ali Zarei note that intellectual currents in the region likewise drew heavily upon Western ideas for their modernizing drive towards democracy, individualism, nationalism,

and capitalism. And Amnon Shiloah notes that Western imperialism was effectively synonymous with modernization in the world of Middle Eastern and Arab music, causing many musicians and singers to modernize their practice according to Western musical norms of performance and recording.

Like El Khachab, but in the African context, Lizelle Bisschoff notes that cinema's technological dependencies tied its modernization to Western technologies from access to which would-be African filmmakers were systematically barred until the post-independence period in the latter half of the twentieth century. Their reliance upon Western-controlled circuits of distribution ties them still, as one aspect of what she calls 'dependency syndrome'. Prita Meier extends this complex situation to the realm of visual arts by shifting the terms slightly; for her, modernity and imperialism are equated. This equation produces a difficult double-bind for African artists who simultaneously want to participate in global modernity – and the global art community – and yet want to reject imperialism and its damaging legacies. Nicholas Meihuizen complicates matters yet further by insisting that sub-Saharan African literary modernism records a deep ambivalence where writers at once craved imperialist modernity for the sake of becoming modern, and yet abhorred the imperialism by which it arrived and was established. The self-examination, ambiguity, and obscurity to which such an ambivalence gives rise characterizes the hybrid forms and narrative innovations he sees as part of African literary modernism.

In a slightly different key, though on much the same line, many other writers more directly identified modernism/modernity with imperialism. Irene Gammel and Cathy Waszczuk note that imperialism played a key role in European modernist intellectual currents both by affording a global perspective and by decentring Western culture in provocative ways. Still in Europe, Stephen Downes traces lines of influence in music that repeat the centre-periphery model of empire, with Paris and Vienna serving as centres while the rest of Europe and the UK was marginalized. In her treatment of visual arts in the Middle East and Arab world, Nada Shabout directly equates modernity with Eurocentrism, noting that the concept itself is a Western construct that elevates to universal acclaim Western values, practices, and beliefs. Tsitsi Jaji, writing about music in sub-Saharan Africa, continues this line of critique, referring to imperialism itself as the shock of modernity: the means by which modernity arrives forcibly and irrevocably. William Cunningham Bissell pushes even further, noting that imperialism effectively dehistoricized modernism and imposed it upon African architecture with no regard for local histories or conditions. Whole cities, designed in Europe along universalist modernist lines, were imposed upon African landscapes as monuments to the folly modernism could produce when it was exported wholesale as one mode of imperialist domination.

The global reach of the chapters in this volume means that not only European imperialism is at stake, but American and Japanese as well. Davina Jackson, writing about architecture and design in Australasia and Oceania, frames her treatment of modernism largely in terms of American influence – even when that American influence is channelled through Asian styles, as in the later work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Leif Sorensen's discussion of intellectual currents in the United States and Canada likewise notes that American imperialist ambitions shaped how artists thought about the world, modernism, and the role of art. And writers addressing modernism in Latin America focus extensively on American influence through

imperialism as key to the development of modernism and – more importantly – modernismo. Félipe Hernandez’s chapter on Latin American modernist architecture powerfully exposes the role played by American economic interests in dictating the development of architectural design, locating modernist design firmly as a cultural appendage of economic and political domination. Amy A. Oliver, writing about intellectual currents in the same region, suggests instead that modernism tested the power of American influence, and that it was always at least somewhat capable of resistance to domination. Emily McGinn’s chapter on modernist literature in Latin America goes one step further, tracing how modernismo and its related movements articulated forceful resistance to American imperialism and European cultural domination. José Martí’s ‘Our America’ stands as an iconic document of that resistance, and testimony to the power of artistic and intellectual movements to resist political and economic oppression. Finally, Karen Thornber’s searching overview of literature in Asia aligns with Christopher Bush’s and Peter G. Rowe’s assertions about the influence of Japanese imperialism on the development of modernism in the region. Noting that the Meiji regime welcomed Western innovation at the same time as Japan exerted cultural force upon countries such as Korea and Taiwan, these writers insist that even imperialism must be particularized and localized if we are to understand its role in developing a global modernism.

In that spirit, and moving towards more particularity, many of the writers in this volume have noted the ongoing importance of issues such as orientalism and primitivism in global modernist studies. As one might expect, orientalism manifests as most important in the regions directly studied under its aegis: the Middle East and Arab world, and to a lesser extent, Africa. Stavros Stavrou Karayanni (dance), Dina Amin (theatre), and Nada Shabout (visual arts) all note the lasting negative impact of orientalism in the Middle East and Arab world. Yahia Mahmoud (intellectual currents) and Chukwuma Okoye (theatre) argue much the same for sub-Saharan Africa, linking orientalism to primitivism as twin evils attendant upon European imperialism. As imperialism’s scholarly division, orientalism thrived by denigrating local tradition in the name of a superior Western modernity, creating troubled conditions for the adoption of modernism in colonized spaces.

Orientalism’s ugly companion, primitivism, treats colonized and non-Western peoples as uncultured, animalistic, and atavistic – though it often articulates those characteristics in romanticized terms of authenticity, naturalness, and mythic force. Writing about visual arts in Europe, Ara H. Merjian notes influential artists such as Pablo Picasso’s practice of dehistoricizing and decontextualizing African cultural products for free adaptation into his own painting. Leif Sorensen, writing about intellectual currents in Canada and the United States, notes that a similar practice informed thinking about modernism as a break with over-civilized and decadent Western culture in that region as well. Primitivism seems to have hit home most profoundly, however, in the Australian/Oceanian and African contexts. Ann Stephen and Andrew McNamara note that Australian and Oceanian visual artists, drawn primarily from the settler population, often followed European precedent in drawing upon indigenous artefacts to inspire their own work. Matthew Hall outlines the complexity of primitivism as an impetus for artistic innovation in Australia and Oceania, noting as well the deep ambivalence it provoked in both settler and indigenous artists. In the African context things are at once equally ambivalent and

slightly more clear-cut. Kariamu Welsh notes that sub-Saharan African modern dance was anti-primitivist in its key impetus, seeking to throw off the misleading caricatures imposed by centuries of imperial domination. Lizelle Bisschoff's chapter on cinema in the region shows how African filmmakers took up local traditions in non-primitivist ways, transforming them for the new media and making them new in the best spirit of modernism.

The rejection of a Eurocentric genesis by former colonies can be cast as a revolutionary rupture or a slow evolution towards independence in which the aesthetic tools of imperialist influence are co-opted to become the means of localization or nationalization. Tsitsi Jaji shows compellingly that African musical traditions influenced American modernist practice while bypassing the primitivist circuit. Instead, they inaugurated what she calls 'stereomodernism', a reciprocal exchange and intermingling of tradition and innovation across the Atlantic. Sarah J. Townsend, writing about Latin American theatre, shows how modernist cultural practice in post-colonial settings reciprocally influenced European and American contexts. On the other hand, colonial influences can remain accepted standards of artistic excellence long after economic and legislative autonomy has been achieved, as Anna Bernard shows in part in her treatment of literature in the Middle East and Arab World, or as Frederick Lau indicates was part of East and Southeast Asian musical modernism. This complexity means that fidelity to global particularities requires a sensitivity attuned to multiple perspectives. Approaches that deviate from the accepted wisdom in the Western academy cannot be dismissed as intellectually tardy for that reason. Understanding global modernism equally means understanding global approaches to its study. It means listening to non-Anglo-American scholars as well as non-Anglo-American artists if a true rethinking of modernism in global terms is to occur.

As many of the chapters indicate, modernism's various and fluid relation to modernity and modernization has often made it complicit with their negative effects. But, as many of our writers attest, it also afforded a powerful means of resisting those effects. In the Anglo-Euro-American context, modernism occupies a profoundly ambiguous position, at once produced by modernity and modernization and consistently opposed to their worst elements. How those elements were understood, and how modernists chose to oppose them, vary wildly, and often conflictually: what one artist deplors, another may celebrate. However they construed the pros and cons of modernism and modernity, though, modernists consistently sought to critique and to chart alternative possibilities across a wide range of concerns – class, gender, sex, sexuality, nationality, aesthetics, conventionality, politics, economics, race, ethnicity, empire. Nor is this only a western phenomenon.

Modernism as a mode of resistance is one of the predominant themes across the chapters gathered here. Though many of our authors have traced modernity and modernization to imperialism's detrimental effects, many (sometimes the same ones) have also shown how modernism afforded a means of resisting those detrimental effects and articulating alternatives to them. Anna Bernard's chapter on literature in the Middle East and Arab world illustrates with striking lucidity how a dialectic between classical literature, modernist experimentation, and further critique allowed writers to challenge Western displacement of Arab tradition and chart paths for developing Arab literature in modernism's wake. Modernist Arab literature could be at once anti-colonialist and modernist, and often the one because it was also the

other. Kaveh Tagharobi and Ali Zarei agree in their survey of intellectual currents in the Middle East and Arab world, arguing that though political instability has made it difficult for modernist thought to take root, the impulse to use it in the name of new, stronger, national and ethnic identities has persisted. For David O'Donnell, writing about theatre in Australia and Oceania, the connection between modernism and critique is even more forceful. The realist theatre against which modernist experiment positioned itself was identified with a colonial ethos. To break with the aesthetics of realist theatre was also to break with the colonial regime that had ratified it. To experiment with form and method in an anti-realist manner was to reject colonialism itself and seek a new way of being in the world.

In the Latin American and sub-Saharan African contexts we find more of the same. Tatiana Flores recounts how modernist practices in the visual arts often took an anti-imperialist stance, seeking at once to reject the influence of the United States and to adopt/adapt modernist techniques in the name of new national and ethnic identities. Jose L. Reynoso's chapter on dance in the region reaffirms this view, but also complicates it by raising the question of how much modernism also reinscribed imperialism. Modernist literary practice in Latin America, writes Emily McGinn, was overpoweringly driven by the need to reject the United States' imperialist interests and cultural influence, and to articulate national identities that could take their place among the foremost nations of the world. The same was true musically, as Alejandro L. Madrid demonstrates, showing how the creative impulse of modernism helped inspire distinctive new sounds as key elements of emerging post-colonial national consciousnesses. In sub-Saharan African intellectual currents, as Yahia Mahmoud illustrates, modernism's chief modality was anti-imperialist, providing intellectuals with the means of casting off its legacy and developing independent political and ethnic identities. Essential to that modality were modernist theatrical and dance practices, as Chukwuma Okoye and Kariamu Welsh trace so carefully in their chapters. For populations sharing many different dialects, languages, and rates of literacy, live performance is an essential means of establishing the narratives that unify, critique, and establish a sense of common futurity: it is mobile, accessible, responsive, and amenable to long-standing traditions of cultural production and consumption.

In South Asia, where the long history of British colonization had to a certain extent naturalized the English literary canon and nineteenth-century aesthetics, modernism offered a crucial chance to enact political rebellion by aesthetic means. Rahul Sapra persuasively shows how Indian filmmakers borrowed the modernist forms of cinema to re-cast Western representations in projects that were at once anti-imperialist and dedicated to establishing a post-colonial national identity. Focussing on the later part of the twentieth century, Ketu H. Katrak writes that dance performed similar work. For both, the enhanced global circuits of information and population movement around the world which are among imperialism's most lasting legacies have also meant that South Asian modernist cultural production has travelled well and exerted a reciprocal influence upon Western practices. Paralleling Australian modernist theatre's break with colonial realism (see O'Donnell's chapter), the visual arts in South Asia embraced modernism as a radical break with the conservative academic tradition. Establishing independence and self-determination through aesthetic means, South Asian modernist visual artists could symbolically shatter English influence and embrace

a new realm of possibilities. Much the same could be said of South Asian modernist writing, though there is an important difference that resonates through many of the other developments outlined here: local conditions force modernism to abandon its tendencies towards decontextualization and dehistoricization in favour of adapting to local pressures and demands. This difference is perhaps most acutely felt in literary production in South Asia, maybe the most linguistically diverse region on earth – albeit one that has been constructed as a region by centuries of imperialist administration. The massive number of languages and dialects jostling on the cultural landscape of South Asia means that modernism of necessity abandoned any pretence to universality: it had either to adapt or to perish.

Fortunately, it adapted, not only in South Asia, but around the world, making hybridity – not homogenizing Western influence – a key feature of global modernist cultural production. The authors writing about music in diverse regions – Australia and Oceania, East and Southeast Asia, and South Asia – point to the convergence of Western sounds, technologies, performance conventions, instruments, notation styles, harmonics, and traditions with their local or indigenous counterparts (see the chapters by Skinner, F. Lau, and Scott). The results are never simple displacement, but fusion, mixture, interpenetration, and adaptation on all fronts. The music that results is neither a Western import nor a local product, but a global hybrid that very often finds its way around the world and further influences artistic development in unanticipated ways. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr's chapter on theatre in East and Southeast Asia emphasizes a similar dynamic – one visible in other regions as well – where cultures and practices mix to produce non-traditional, modernist, works. Likewise, as Reynoso and Katrak observe in very different contexts (Latin America and South Asia, respectively), modern dance articulated much of its ambivalence about modernity and modernization through hybrid forms of performance that required Western conventions to adapt to local demands, and vice versa. Imperialist influence was never far from the scene of choreography, composition, and performance, so that global modernist practitioners had constantly to evaluate what they could keep and what must be rejected not just on the political and cultural-aesthetic fronts, but in terms of artistic disciplines and mixing previously siloed formats (e.g. dance with theatre with music with film with poetry, etc.). For Amy A. Oliver, writing about intellectual currents in Latin America, but articulating a perspective that holds across the regions, modernist thought at its most productive intermingled intellectual traditions to help produce new patterns of global awareness that were at once attentive to the inherent falsehood of any claim to universalism and the irrevocable inter-relatedness of locales.

We have sought something similar in this volume. Our application of the global ambitions of the new modernist studies to modernist cultural production in different regions illustrates both the productivity of thinking of modernism in planetary terms and the dangers of assuming modernism to be singularly recognizable. Modernism has always been hybrid and dynamic, and has always altered those who produced it as much as they changed the conventions and materials with which they worked. As we have suggested, understanding modernism's vitality depends on embracing plurality, and leads to a collective rethinking of the world.

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PART I

EAST AND
SOUTHEAST ASIA



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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTS FOR MODERNISM

Intellectual currents in East Asia

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Christopher Bush

The term ‘modernism’ is commonly used to describe some of the literary and cultural production of the early twentieth century in China, Japan, and Korea, but the range of its application and its relevance to East Asia remain subjects of debate.¹ There was widespread interaction with Western authors, artists, and avant-garde movements, ranging from direct emulation (‘Japanese futurism’) to movements found only in the region (new sensationism). East Asian modernisms were shaped by profound geopolitical asymmetries with the West. Nonetheless, many of the interpretive models offered by postcolonial criticism do not apply to East Asia, which was never colonized by a Western power and indeed produced its own imperialist power in Japan.

JAPAN

The major authors, movements, and motifs of European modernism are readily found in Japan: Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche; jazz, cinema and the city novels; automobiles, airplanes, and avant-gardes, from futurism to surrealism. Modernism straddles what are several distinct periods in Japan, extending from the late Meiji (1868–1912) through the Taishō era (1912–26) and into the Shōwa (1926–89). The Meiji era is conventionally described as a radical break from the isolationism of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), leading to a sometimes uncritical absorption of ‘Western learning’ and breakneck modernization.

On the cultural front, the first decades of the Meiji era were characterized by the active pursuit of ‘civilization and enlightenment’, with figures such as Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer being widely read and cited. Liberal reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi, educated in both Western and Chinese traditions, is widely held to be the exemplary figure of the period.²

Mori Ōgai’s short story ‘The Dancing Girl’ (1890) is perhaps the most famous work of fiction from this period. A polymath from a samurai family who received a traditional Confucian education and had a successful career as a physician, Ōgai was also a major translator of German literature, as well as a lauded author in numerous literary genres, especially historical fiction.³ Futabatei Shimei’s *Drifting*

Clouds (1887–9) was the first modern Japanese novel, ‘modern’ partly for its emulation of Turgenev, but also because of its innovative approximation of the contemporary spoken language, while Futabatei’s teacher Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *The Essence of the Novel* (1885–6) represents the first work of modern criticism. There was an influx of translated novels, especially French and Russian, starting in the 1890s, and by the start of the twentieth century Japanese fiction was dominated by the reception and development of a kind of confessional naturalism, of which Shimizaki Tōson’s *The Broken Commandment* (1906) and Tayama Katai’s *Quilt* (1907) are the foundational works.⁴

Many of the authors from the teens and twenties who remain widely read today do not fit easily into literary-historical categories: Natsume Soseki, probably best known for *Kokoro* (1914); Shiga Naoya, ‘the most canonical of all modern Japanese writers’ (Orbaugh, qtd. in Mostow 2003: 120), was associated with the group around the journal *White Birch* (*Shirakaba*, 1910–23); Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, known internationally for the stories on which Kurosawa Akira’s *Rashomon* was based; and Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, a cinephilic modernist who championed artifice over ‘pure literature’ in a famous debate with Akutagawa (see Mostow, ed. pp.132–135). The novel *Naomi* (*Chijin no ai*, 1925) and the essay *In Praise of Shadows* (1933) are his most widely discussed works in English. The title character of Tanizaki’s *Naomi* stages one man’s ambivalent obsession with ‘the new woman’, explicitly promoted by the journal *Seitō* (*Bluestocking*, 1911–16) through content ranging from the erotic tanka of Yosano Akiko to translations of Emma Goldman.

The 1920s were in many respects dominated by the proletarian literature movement and responses to it, but this work is little read abroad today. The first issue of the journal *The Sower* (1921) marks the conventional starting date for the movement; the 1933 death of Kobayashi Takiji, following his imprisonment and torture, its end. Kobayashi’s most widely read work is *The Crab Cannery Ship* (1929). During the 1930s, many former leftists performed *tenkō* (conversion or apostasy), some seemingly as a matter of survival, others genuinely converting to ultranationalism.

Many of the major European avant-garde movements were echoed in Japan, with surrealism being the most long-lasting and pervasive. Perhaps the most consequential Japanese modernist movement in literature was the *shinkankakuha*, usually translated as ‘new sensationism’ or ‘neo-perceptionism’. Initially inspired by the style of the French writer Paul Morand but incorporating elements of numerous European avant-gardes, its journal was *Bungei jidai* (1924–7). Its representative figure is Yokomitsu Riichi, whose early stories pioneered the style and whose city novel *Shanghai* (1928–9; 1931) is arguably the movement’s major work. However, the most famous writer to emerge from this group was Kawabata Yasunari, who not only wrote some of the movement’s major critical statements, but also the screenplay for the most important Japanese avant-garde film – Kinugasa Teinosuke’s 1926 *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ichipeiji*) – and the other great Japanese city novel, *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (1930), set in Tokyo’s entertainment district. Ironically, by the time he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968, Kawabata was considered a champion of traditional Japanese aesthetics.⁵

A defining element of Japanese modernism was its proximity to popular culture. Rather than signalling a sphere of high, elite art distinguishing itself from the popular, *modanizumu* always had strong ties to popular culture, including cinema, cabaret, and detective fiction.⁶

The single most important modern philosophical school was the Kyoto School, later infamous for its complicity with the authoritarian state during the 1930s and 1940s. By no means constituting a unified school of thought, all of the thinkers nonetheless agreed on the importance of Nishida Kitaro, whose 1911 *An Inquiry into the Good* is often discussed as the first work of Japanese philosophy (depending, of course, on how one defines ‘philosophy’; see Dilworth *et al.* 1998: 574). Maraldo identifies as common factors: a background in both Western and Asian philosophy; a critical attitude toward Western conceptions of modernity; and a philosophical engagement with Buddhist concepts, especially ‘absolute nothingness’ (Dilworth *et al.* 1998: 639–45). Tanabe Hajime, one younger member of the group, seems to have had an influence on Nishida himself. Miki Kiyoshi, Nishitani Keiji, and Abe Masao are among the more famous from the group, which also has connections with Kuki Shūzo, Watsuji Tetsuro, Tosaka Jun, and D. T. Suzuki.⁷

KOREA

Korea’s colonial era is conventionally divided into three periods: military rule from 1910 to 1919; ‘cultural rule’, from 1920 to 1931; and the period of mobilization/imperialization [*hwangminhwa*], from 1931 to 1945. Korea’s was thus a ‘colonial modernity’; urbanization, industrialization, modernism – indeed, mass literacy and modern vernacular literature in general – emerged in the context of colonial occupation, including often intense censorship.

Korea’s ‘civilization and enlightenment’ moment came around the turn of the century. Beginning in 1906 the ‘new fiction’ (*shin sosŏl*) emerged, including Yi Injik’s *Tears of Blood*, whose direct treatment of social problems in contemporary life garnered mass appeal. In 1908 Ch’oe Namsŏn founded Korea’s first literary journal, *Youth* (*Sonyŏn*), with a nationalist, reformist agenda. Based on that journal’s publication of Ch’oe’s ‘From the Sea to Youth’, 1908 is one of the two conventional dates given for the beginning of modern (*kundae*) Korean literature. The other, more common date is 1917, the year of Yi Kwangsu’s novel *The Heartless*: modern in its content, vernacular language, and linguistically innovative impersonal address. Both authors shared a reformist agenda and both would later be among the 33 signatories of the 8 February 1919 Declaration of Independence. Yi was an anti-traditional activist who critiqued Confucian hierarchy, promoted women’s rights, helped establish a vernacular literary language, and is generally thought of as the founder of Korean literary criticism (Mostow 648–9). He also became a collaborator during the Japanese occupation.⁸

During the period of ‘cultural rule’, Japan sought to promote the study of Korean culture (within certain limits): 1927 saw the start of the first scholarly journal on the Korean language, *Hangul*, which fed into efforts to create the first comprehensive dictionary of the language in the 1930s. Founded in 1919 by Kim Tongin, the journal *Creation* (*Ch’angjo*) argued against the previous generation’s utilitarian, didactic use of literature, promoting in its place the idea of literature as art.⁹

Following the political failures of 1919, Korean Communist groups began to form in earnest, mostly abroad. By the mid 1920s, the proletarian arts movement was a dominant voice in Korean arts and letters, embodied by the Korean Artist Proletariat Federation (KAPF) (1925–35), an organization that often worked in collaboration with the Japan Proletarian Literary Front, founded the same year.

However, starting in 1931 Japanese military dominance intensified even in civilian life and, after the proletarian literature movement was shut down in 1935, direct political commentary became all but impossible. In 1937 Japan began an active campaign to destroy Korean culture: national treasures were pillaged on a massive scale and taken to Japan, where many remain; *Shinto* worship became compulsory; the Korean language was banned in schools, then in publications, and eventually even in public. A campaign to pressure Koreans to adopt Japanese names began in 1940, the same year the last two Korean-language newspapers were closed (Ch'oe *et al.* 2000: 315). In this difficult environment, Korean modernism somehow flourished, including a Korean New Sensationist (*sin ganguk*) movement directly influenced by recent Japanese literature. The modernist tendency was associated with a collective of writers known as the Group of Nine (*kuinhoe*), which defined itself in opposition to the KAPF by focusing on form and pure literature (*sunsu munhak*). In practice, however, artists moved between the tendencies and their aesthetic practices were not always distinct.¹⁰ The best-known writers from the group include Pak T'aewŏn, Kim Yujŏng, Yi T'aejun, and Yi Sang, but others joined and left the group over the years. Pak's major literary works are *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* (1934), and *Scenes by a Stream* (1936/1938), but he is also known for critical essays (Hanscom 2013). The major critic of the group was Kim Kirim, an important interpreter of the major European avant-garde movements and of psychoanalysis. His work also shows the influence of the era's major Anglophone critics, including Pound, Eliot, and Richards.

The contemporary study of 'modernism' in Korea has been shaped by historical debates even more so than in China and Japan because many of the major modernist writers were censored in South Korea until the late 1980s, in part because many 'went north'.

CHINA

Modernism in China largely coincides with the history of the Republic of China, established following the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and officially coming to an end (on the mainland) with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Modern cultural history is conventionally divided into the late Qing (roughly 1895–1911, characterized by various ultimately unsuccessful reform movements); the period of the May Fourth Movement, which, starting in 1919, initiated a pro-modernization break with tradition; and a radicalization of intellectuals in the late 1920s, leading to the deep Nationalist/Communist divide that would largely define the 1930s and 1940s. 'Modernism' has until recently been a relatively understudied category in Chinese literary history, viewed as an essentially derivative, imported phenomenon limited mostly to Shanghai and out of step with the main current of modern Chinese literature, namely the development of realist fiction in an accessible vernacular.¹¹

The humiliating defeat of the first Sino-Japanese War intensified the Chinese literati's desire for reform. In part because of savage critiques by May Fourth writers, this generation of reformers has often been dismissed as atavistic, but recent scholarship has emphasized the modernity of the late Qing as well as the innovativeness of 'traditional' literature well into the twentieth century. Yan Fu translated authors

such as Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Henry Huxley, while Lin Shu and his assistants produced 'free translations of over 200 Western novels' into Classical Chinese in an effort to revitalize the latter (Denton 1996: 8). Zhang Zhidong's formulation, 'Chinese learning as the goal, Western learning as the means', remains widely cited, but an array of reformers formulated other neo-traditionalisms, mixing liberal political science, Confucian cosmology, and Darwinian biology. The anti-Manchu 'national essence' school sought to reform the educational system while still preserving Chinese traditions against excessive Western influence, while Kang Youwei's Reform Party promoted the idea of Confucianism as a state religion. Perhaps the most important figure of this period was Liang Qichao. A political activist who spent time in exile in Japan, Liang worked in a wide range of genres, from poetry to journalism to philosophy. Drawing heavily on Fukuzawa Yukichi's writings, he called for China to develop independently, thinking intellectuals rather than educated bureaucrats, declaring 'I love Confucius, but I love the truth more'.¹²

The May Fourth Movement is named after the 1919 student protests triggered by outrage over the Treaty of Versailles having given Chinese territory to Japan, but the term more broadly refers to a generation and a set of values: iconoclasm, anti-Confucianism, and language modernization. This 'Chinese Enlightenment' was not narrowly about political reform but the broader propagation of a New Culture movement. The journal *New Youth*, founded in Shanghai by Chen Duxiu (1915), represents the breadth of the movement's ambitions, including the cultivation of individualism and the valorization of personal relationships (one issue included Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*). Lu Xun's short stories, gathered in 1922's *Call to Arms*, are the movement's signature literary works, especially 'Diary of a Madman' (1918) and 'The True Story of Ah Q' (1921).¹³

Throughout the 1920s, two major literary groups were at odds with each other. The Literary Research Society (1920–32) characterized itself as social, realist, even scientific. Major figures included Zhou Zuoren, Ye Shengtao, and Mao Dun, this last the figure most strongly identified with the emergence of literary criticism (*wenxue pipíng*) as a distinct profession in China. The other group, the Creation Society (1921–5), included Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu, and Cheng Fangwu. Guo Moruo's 1921 translation of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was seminal for the May Fourth generation and the whole group was broadly identified as a 'romantic' school emphasizing subjectivity and personal freedom. In reality, it was internally quite diverse and starting in 1925 the majority 'converted' to Marxism, the title of one of Cheng's essays becoming a slogan for radicalization of the goals of May Fourth: 'From Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature'.

Another important group, one with strong connections to Anglophone modernism, was the Crescent Moon Society (1923–31). Its affiliates included Hu Shi (who studied with John Dewey at Columbia), Xu Zhimo (Columbia and Cambridge), Liang Shiqiu (who studied with Irving Babbitt at Harvard), Lin Huiyin (China's first woman architect), Wen Yiduo, Shen Congwen, and Ling Shuhua ('the Chinese Katherine Mansfield'). The group was widely associated with poetry (particularly that of Xu and Wen) and was very well connected internationally: John Dewey visited Hu Shi in China shortly before the May Fourth protests and in 1924 the group was visited by Rabindranath Tagore (one of whose poems was the source of the group's name).

A general radicalization of literary critics and writers began in 1926, in part following from the anti-imperialist May Thirtieth Movement, named after the 1925 incident in which Shanghai police under British control opened fire on a crowd of students supporting striking workers. These years also saw the birth of two major anarchist journals by Chinese exiles: *New Century* in Paris and *Natural Morality* in Tokyo; the latter published the first Chinese translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. A telling example of both the rapidity of China's political change during this period, and also the permeability of the boundaries between these various trends sketched here, is the life of Chen Duxiu. Born more than three decades before the fall of the Qing dynasty, Chen was given a Confucian education and went through the imperial examination system, but became a patriotic reformer, then a leading figure in the May Fourth Movement (famously espousing the twin goods of science and democracy), then co-founded the Chinese Communist Party (in 1921, with Li Dazhao) before being expelled from the party because of a disagreement with Mao.

Over the past 20 years or so, there has been renewed interest in modernist Shanghai, the fifth largest city in the world by 1930 and an international crossroads with more than 300 bookstores, a thriving film culture, and, in the foreign concessions in particular, the latest technological innovations. Shanghai modernism had both parallels to and direct connections with those of Europe and Japan: the prominence of cinema and a new mass culture, the new woman, the disorienting tempo of metropolitan life and its reordering of experience. The editor of the journal *Les Contemporains*, Shi Zhecun, pioneered stories about the inner lives of Shanghai urbanites, as in the stories collected in *One Evening in the Rainy Season*. Shanghai also had a New Sensationist movement, the major figures of which were Liu Na'ou and Mu Shiying. Liu's only book was *City Scenery* (1930), but he contributed greatly to the literary scene as the owner of a bookstore and as the editor of the journals *La Nouvelle Littérature* and *Trackless Track*, the latter of which introduced Morand to Chinese readers in 1928. Mu, generally considered the major talent of Chinese New Sensationism, wrote formally experimental short stories such as 'Shanghai Foxtrot' that emulated the thrills and confusion of urban popular culture.¹⁴

NOTES

1. This brief outline draws heavily on the authors listed in the Works Cited, especially Mostow (ed.) and the three *Sources* anthologies. Thanks to Christopher Hanscom and Carlos Rojas for their expertise and corrections.
2. In addition to Fukuzawa himself, see Wakabayashi (ed.) for an introduction to the period.
3. See the selections in Rimer and Gessel (eds).
4. In addition to Mostow (ed.), see C. Hill.
5. Sas, Solt, and Weisenfeld.
6. See Harootunian, LaMarre, Lippit, Silverberg, Starrs (ed.), and especially Tyler.
7. For introductions and overviews of the Kyoto School, see Dilworth, Viglielmo, and Zavala (eds); Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo (eds); Heisig and Maraldo (eds); and Marra. For other philosophical responses to modernity, see Doak on the Romantic School and Takeuchi.
8. See Hanscom, Lew, and Ryu (eds).
9. See Hanscom, Lew, and Ryu (eds); Fulton and Kwon (eds); and McCann.
10. See Hanscom and Hughes.
11. Denton (ed.) and Goldman and Lee (eds).

12. See M. Hill, Wang, and Wu.
13. Schwarcz, Tang, and X. Zhang (p.33). On language change, see Gunn and Liu.
14. On Shanghai modernism, see Field, Lee, Shih, and Z. Zhang.

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CHAPTER TWO

BUILDING FORWARDS AND BACKWARDS IN TIME

Architectural modernism in East and Southeast Asia



Peter G. Rowe

When discussing modernism in the architecture of East and Southeast Asia, it is customary to divide the topic into two regional components. One, normally referred to as East Asia, is comprised of China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and is collected together generally under the auspices of a shared Confucian culture. The other, referred to as Southeast Asia, now composed of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, is less culturally coherent and made up of different ethnic groups, languages, religions, and social identities.

In East Asia, the impetus to modernize arrived forcefully on the shores of China and Japan around the middle of the nineteenth century, primarily in the form of gunboat diplomacy in the hands of Western powers. These disruptions were essentially about trade and the prospects of burgeoning markets for products of surging Western industrial development. A result was decidedly unequal treaties and humiliation for the locals. Response in China came through the Self-Strengthening Movement from 1861 to 1895, followed by subsequent attempts to reform until the fall of the Qing Dynasty around 1911 (Fairbank 1953). In Japan, response was embedded in the Meiji Restoration from 1868–1912 (Irokawa 1985 [1969]). Central to the Self-Strengthening Movement was the concept of ‘Chinese learning for essential values and western learning for practical applications’, manifesting an attempt to fend off contamination, while attempting to acquire, unsuccessfully as it turned out, wealth and a strong army believed to be essential for untarnished survival (Feng 1964 [1960]: 48).

By contrast, the Japanese embrace of modernization was both more pro-active and thoroughgoing. Comparatively, the legacies of tradition handed down from Shogunate Japan were more conducive to modernization along Western lines, whereas those from dynastic China proved to be too static, backward, and passive to respond effectively to threats from the West (Liao 2006: 10). Japan also enjoyed early success in the Sino–Japanese conflict concluded in 1895, followed by success in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–5, the annexation of Taiwan and Korea in 1895 and 1910 respectively, and substantial encroachment into Manchuria shortly thereafter. Further away in Southeast Asia – with the exception of Thailand, which remained a monarchist redoubt – all the other countries, in their various guises and at various

times, were directly colonized by the Western powers of Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and the United States, as well as by Japan during its pursuit of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere between 1933 and 1945 (Lin and Anderson-Wu 2010: 252). Moreover, these colonial circumstances remained in place until after the Second World War and sometime later in several cases.

EARLY MODERN ARCHITECTURE

During the Meiji Restoration, the architecture of Japan began to westernize in a manner that became synonymous with modernization. This shift occurred through local encounters with industrialization and Western lifestyles, as well as through the introduction of new types of buildings in the service of foreign trade. As Japan itself modernized, new administrative headquarters, railway stations, ministries, schools, and military barracks were constructed. In most respects, the architectural style of the Meiji Restoration was a version of the then post-1850 European building and architecture, with differences reflective of Japanese climate, technology to the extent it existed, material availability, and prevailing local customs (Stewart 2002: 15). With few exceptions it was not particularly remarkable to Western visitors, although probably quite the opposite to locals. The modern profession of architecture was first institutionalized in a Western manner with the Imperial College of Engineering and the creation of the architecture programme around 1876 (Stewart 2002: 33).

The modern buildings and architecture of the Self-Strengthening Movement, reflecting China's defensive posture towards westernization, were largely confined to Treaty Ports – the spoils of gunboat diplomacy – and to factory and military installations in the hands of local reformers. Foreign architects also drew up proposals to house the Qing's belated reforms and some local architects built in a Western manner (Rowe and Kuan 2002: 24–54). Still, it was in Treaty Ports, like Shanghai, with their foreign jurisdictions, that modernization was more thoroughly introduced in the form of technology, industry, scientific management, and contemporary lifestyles. It was also where modern architecture materialized most, again as in Japan, largely through new building types in an eclectic array of Western styles ranging from the neo-classical Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank of 1923 through the *art deco* of the Sassoon House of 1929 to the *moderne* Embankment Building of 1933 (Rowe and Kuan 2002: 55–86). Given the strong territorial distinctions between one nation's 'concessions' and another's, architectural expression also differed but tended to follow styles current in the home country. Local modern professional education and practice also flourished, although starting more recently in China than in Japan, around the 1920s with the return of the first generation of Chinese architects trained abroad (Rowe and Wang 2011).

During the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea and Taiwan, architecture, particularly of public buildings, followed models from Japan. Interestingly though, when it came to modern city planning and building, the Japanese accomplished more abroad in their version of modernity than they did at home, where entrenched interests and disasters, like the Kantō Earthquake of 1923, hindered local efforts (Jung 2013: 3–22). Typically this modernity took the form of axial arrangements of diagonally intersecting boulevards, emanating from neo-classical *rond points*, or traffic circles, along with a uniform grid of streets and blocks. Further, legibility was

introduced in Western fashion by placing prominent buildings around the traffic circles in the overall plan. Later on, these practices were more strongly manifest in Japan's Manchuria and in cities like Changchun (Buck 2000).

In Southeast Asia, religion and a shared tropical climate largely decided the styles of traditional architecture that emerged of any lasting significance. Modernization coming with Western colonization initially involved the transplantation of commercial activities and institutions housed in new building types as in East Asia. Moreover, they were usually built in an architecture closely resembling prevalent styles in colonial home countries but also in a manner that responded to local climate, particularly with regard to sun-shading, natural ventilation, flash flooding, as well as available materials (Lin and Anderson-Wu 2010: 252–53). This response, in turn, led to otherwise Western-style buildings with long eave lines, arcades, verandahs, atriums and sometimes, multi-layered roofs.

ARCHITECTURAL MODERNISM AND BEING MODERN

What is often referred to as 'orthodox' or 'avant-garde modernism' that appeared in both China and Japan in the 1930s and elsewhere in Southeast Asia sometime later essentially originated in Europe in the 1920s, if not before. It was closely associated with the new realities, or *die neue Sachlichkeit*, of advanced technology and material for building, alongside of scientific understandings of building processes and functional layouts, all tied up with rational modern lifestyles (Lane 1968: 131; Rowe 1993: 97–101). Indeed, dictums like 'form follows function' and 'less is more', emphasizing efficiencies, were also often associated with this form of modernism, as were mechanistic analogies like 'dwellings are machines to live in' (Banham 1960). In addition, there were Le Corbusier's 'Five Points' comprising supports, roof gardens, free design of the ground plane, horizontal windows, and free design of the façade, all implying an entirely new kind of building (Conrads 1970: 99). Further, there was a claimed universality involved, regardless of local or regional circumstances. In effect, the modern movement was a reaction to past and sometimes contemporary architecture in period styles that were often highly ornamented and contained concepts of functionalism rooted in the organic complexity and holism of building shapeliness and articulation of parts and wholes, rather than with technical and material efficiency. In East and Southeast Asia, 'orthodox modernism' or 'avant-garde' was a way of strongly expressing and symbolizing becoming modern and entering into a brave new world, beyond being contemporary, like the Banchō Seidlung of 1931 in central Tokyo and the Victoria Nurses Dormitory of 1930 in Shanghai.

Nevertheless, as Hegel eloquently put it, there are two sides to the 'modern', as he called it. For him, if the 'modern' represents a newly emerged present, then it should have the aspect of the present aiming towards the future, or brave new world, as well as the aspect of the present fading back into the past (Habermas 1987: 5–6). Therefore, as East Asia was opened up to a not entirely benign Western influence and began to catch up in so many ways, along with Southeast Asia in its post-colonial incarnations, both regions effectively entered into a 'new present'. Furthermore, the 'presencing' that came along with these emergences set in train two aspects in architecture: one in 'orthodox' or 'avant-garde modernism' and the other in regional 'revivalisms'. As time wore on, however, the tensions between these two rather

extreme positions gave rise to another conceptual space, where ‘orthodox modernism’ came to exist with regional inflections and ‘revivalism’ became tempered by contemporary circumstances. The ‘folding in’, as it were, from both sides towards the middle in different times and in different places, yielded a number of ‘modernisms’ and not just one.

REGIONAL TRENDS TO AND FROM MODERNISM

When avant-garde modernism appeared in Japan in the 1930s, it also took place alongside an official nationalistic style of architecture in a traditional revivalist form of architecture known as Imperial Crown Style (Stewart 2002: 107–11). Between these was a relatively bland, masonry-clad, block-like commercial architecture, sometimes referred to as *moderne*. During the immediate post-Second World War period, international style modernism flourished in Japan, including some monumental projects honoring war victims and associated with public buildings like the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Complex of 1955, followed in the 1960s by several sculptural works of modern architecture for the Tokyo Olympic Games (Bognár 1995). Shortly thereafter, the ‘metabolists’ emerged as a strain of radical modernist thinking, especially with regard to cities, which they saw as developing in a manner, like metabolic processes, embodying change and renewal (Lin 2010; Mori Art Museum 2011). In the period of rising affluence during the 1970s and well into the 1980s, formalism and architecture for its own sake took precedence, alongside efforts to genuinely broaden the scope of architectural modernism, particularly with inclusion of Japanese manners of spatial appreciation. Much of the architecture in the 1980s was also full of post-modern quotations, reacting as elsewhere to a need to move beyond what had become perceived as a bland rationalism to an architecture replete with symbolism and a sense of history and tradition (Rowe 2006: 25). Then, with the bursting of the economic and property asset bubble in the early 1990s and the horror of catastrophic events like the Kobe Earthquake, an interest in urban circumstances returned to architecture, along with a more transparent and simple modernism (Igarashi 2010: 192). Today, although local culture is certainly important, Japanese architecture transcends the usual regional boundaries and is modern in a more universal sense of belonging to the contemporary world (Daniell 2008).

By the 1930s in China, besides a penchant for *moderne* and *art deco* in architecture, particularly in Treaty Ports like Shanghai, several local and foreign firms designed in an orthodox modernist manner (Rowe and Kuan 2002: 81). Also, as in Japan, this was accompanied by an official nationalistic revivalist style promoted by the Nationalist government, ‘glorifying China’s past while building in an otherwise modern manner’ (Rowe and Kuan 2002: 73–76). The post-Civil War period of the 1950s commenced with the so-called ‘Big Roof’ architecture, embodying ‘socialist content and national form’, before sliding almost by default into a modernist stance under deteriorating economic conditions, with an increasingly debased modern architecture of ‘function, form, and appearance when circumstances allow’ (Liu 1959: 3–12). Immediately after the opening up to the outside world around 1978, the arrival of ‘Culture Fever’ gave rise to ‘modern content and Chinese form’ and a return to revivalist expression, alongside a continuation of Chinese architecture’s allegorical aspect of being expressive of something else, sometimes mistaken for post-

modernism, like the Beijing West Railway Station of 1996 (Li 1988: 52; Chen 1992). As time went on into the 1980s and the new millennium, urbanization intensified as did the appearance of many iconic hyper-modern buildings, largely in the hands of foreign architects and at the behest of state sponsors, with an exaggeration of many of the ensemble of modernist architecture's inherent characteristics, marking the arrival of a 'new China' on the world stage (Rowe 2011: 19–73). Recently, a third stream of architecture has emerged alongside corporate and state-sponsored show pieces representing a 'new modernism' of *xiao* (small), *qing* (clear), and *xin* (novel) features and concerns for China's 'new realities', including a certain modesty of means in the nation as a whole to be found in a project like the Bridge School in Xiashi Village of 2008 (Rowe and Kan 2013: 8; Zhou 2013).

During Korea's developmental period after the Japanese occupation and civil war, roughly from 1960 to 1988, architecture slowly emerged, although again in at least two directions (Song 2012). One coincided with international style modern architecture, whereas the other adhered to the military regime's policy of 'creating new national arts based on traditional culture', mandating traditional forms for new public buildings (Jung 2013: 82). Apartments, which became the dominant type of middle-class housing, were almost uniformly modernist in high-rise and slab-block configurations. From the full rise of democracy in South Korea from 1993 onwards, architecture entered a new phase, similar to China around the same time, and was divided among work mainly by foreign architects and later by the emergence of Korean architects. Again, a mix of hyper-modernist commercial and iconic special-built projects was constructed, where many of the ensembles of modernist architectural characteristics were amplified, particularly with regard to engineering prowess and material finishes, as at Boutique Monaco in Seoul of 2008 or the Incheon International Airport of 2002 (Chung 2010). Among local architects, by contrast, a 'new realism' emerged around urban, material, and topographic aspects, alongside time-honoured conditions now interpreted in a contemporary manner (Park and Hong 2012).

Taiwan, under its militaristic regime until the late 1980s, went through similar trends in architectural development. On the one hand, modernist high-rise and commercial buildings dominated Taipei's urban landscape, whereas on the other, large institutional structures included copious traditional architectural references (Roan 2013). However, although the incorporation of an expression of tradition in contemporary Korean architecture had run its course by the onset of the democratic period, the same cannot be said for Taiwan in the contemporary era, which also started with the emergence of true democracy in the 1990s. There, work by the so-called Taiwanese Vernacular Clique is a prominent form of architectural thinking that purportedly straddles and blends 'East' and 'West' but also bears a striking resemblance to post-modernism earlier in the West and particularly the United States, which is very apparent in Taipei 101 of 2003 (Rowe 2011: 130).

The evolutionary pattern and trajectory of the modern in architecture in Southeast Asia began with 'colonial modern' and largely Western styles of architecture synonymous with practices of the time in home countries, with noticeable manifestations to accommodate tropical and less familiar climates (Nas 2006). During the post-colonial era up to about the 1980s, architectural expression in the region became pre-occupied with establishing national identities and was oriented in two rather distinct directions (Lin and Anderson-Wu 2010: 252). The first, often

mandated by the powers in charge, as in Sukarno's Indonesia and in Thailand, was towards recovery of a traditional-appearing authenticity replete with copious imitations of elements of older indigenous architecture like temples, mosques, and palaces. The second, by contrast, was steadfastly modern and pointed in the direction of the future rather than the past but also in a manner where a conspicuous effort to scale up the architecture of public buildings was made, in places like the Philippines and Malaysia, to somehow match the grandeur of those in the past, resulting in a 'monumental modernism' clearly on display at the Theatre of Performing Arts in Manila of 1969 (Polites 1977). Then, as time moved on into the 1990s and the new millennium, two further strains appeared to share the region's architectural scene. The first, common throughout other parts of Asia, comprised a globally familiar and actively promoted mix of commercial architecture and iconic, mainly hyper-modern buildings primarily under state sponsorship, as in China, that became most conspicuous in Singapore (Rowe 2010). The second strain, resistive to the first, was a 'vernacular modernism' that strove to ally and merge local building resources of both spatial and material kinds, with longstanding expressions of being modern that sought clarity and honesty in function, structure, and material substance (Lin and Anderson-Wu 2010).

ARCHITECTURAL MODERNISMS AND GLOBAL CULTURE

In spite of the division that is usually made between East Asia and Southeast Asia in these kinds of discussions, at least with regard to architectural modernity, there are some broad similarities. In both cases, 'modern' was initially directly equated with westernization and the adoption of Western practices introduced by foreign and colonial powers. Also, the swing in architectural expression, typically between a version of national identity, alongside or actively embracing being modern in the world, took place at regular intervals in both places. One outcome of these swings was both a locally tempered architectural modernism and a restrained architectural revivalism. Over time, the bombast and comparatively extreme position-taking of both kinds of architecture has diminished, if not become exhausted, at least locally, where it really counts. In today's global culture, localism, certainly in East and Southeast Asia's 'new architectural modernisms', is no longer in opposition to some universal condition. Indeed, to the extent that such a global condition might be said to exist, its architectural contents and trajectories appear to be defined now by increasingly interconnected local cultures and architectural modernities.

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CHAPTER THREE

MODERNISM AND CINEMA IN EAST ASIA



Jenny Kwok Wah Lau

‘Modernity’ made its appearance in East Asia in the nineteenth century. The term ‘modern’ (or the Chinese transliteration ‘*mo deng*’) describes the newness coming from the West,¹ in contrast to prevailing cultural and political traditions. Different East Asian countries responded differently, according to their specific historical situations. As I have indicated elsewhere, ‘Those who are more conscious of the complexity of human issues believe that although modernity may be Western in origin and global in reach, the transformation of a vast collection of people [...] could hardly be uniform’ (Lau 2003: 2). Though at times Western ‘newness’ was absorbed without much examination of its philosophical or ideological underpinnings, it also occasioned intense political disputes as to whether the modern was better or worse, sometimes precipitating wide-scale national conflicts, including the Cultural Revolution in China.²

Japan welcomed Western modernization beginning with the Meiji period (1868–1912). But their affirmative attitude went through changes after the Second World War because of the trauma of the atomic bombs and the subsequent Allied occupation. Meanwhile, China’s experience with the West since the 1800s see-sawed between struggles against colonial aggression and an admiration of Western knowledge, technology, and certain of its liberating humanist ideas, as in the 1919 May Fourth Movement. Korea and Taiwan share commonalities with China: Western technology was welcomed, but colonial domination was resented. In Hong Kong, a century of British colonial rule resulted in a strong sense of ambivalence and alienation,³ which could not be erased even after Hong Kong was re-annexed by China in 1997. Consequently, East Asian modernism emerged in a non-uniform manner, with variations arising sometimes due to local needs, sometimes to political or economic convenience.

The cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea reflect these diverse and sometimes contradictory responses. Writing about them is thus challenging not only because they have very different histories and hence different responses towards the modern, but because their cinemas began at different times and developed at different paces. They also stalled at different moments because of wars, economic conditions, or internal politics and then re-emerged in different guises.

MODERN OBJECTS

Cinema itself is a product of technology and modernity. Its very form of expression is always modern, and its content depicts mostly modern reality. Costume films aside, cinema screens are filled with the objects of modern life: witness the prevalent imagery of the modern cityscape populated by urbane (especially upper-class or intellectual) residents. The modern look of high-rises and neon lights appears in Chinese films as early as the 1930s: *Street Angel's* (1937) opening credits are superimposed over shots of city icons – neon lights, city streets, European colonial-style buildings, European churches, and even close-up shots of the now famous HSBC⁴ lion statues outside the bank's Shanghai headquarters. The story takes place in Shanghai, opening with a tilt-up shot of a modern high-rise. The male protagonist is a member of a music band, which is seen marching through the street. His Western-style band uniform, the music itself, and references to newspapers establish the setting as a modern city. Victorian architecture mingling with high-rises is a common motif in films made both in Shanghai and Hong Kong, two of the most modern cities in China. Reading Victorian architecture as a sign of the modern might seem ironic since the Victorian was not part of the modern in the West, but it was radically new in China. The Victorian thus becomes ironically modernist, illustrating the maxim that the *modern* itself varies according to context.

During this same period, Japan was undergoing an inter-war modernist fervour. Urbane architecture, literature, fashions, and advertising were everywhere. They formed a natural milieu for its *gendai-geki* (contemporary film).⁵ Yasujiro Ozu is among the most well-known directors of the *gendai-geki* since the 1930s. His comedy *I Was Born But...* (1932) provides a glimpse of the modern in Japan at the time. The film begins with a man whose truck (a Western vehicle) gets stuck in the mud. He is wearing suit and tie (Western attire) and therefore is not well prepared to deal with the mechanical problems involved. He finally manages to rescue his vehicle and he goes to see his boss, who also lives a Western lifestyle – playing tennis (a Western sport) in a country club (a Western social association). While all these objects seem 'natural' in a modern cosmopolitan environment, they would have registered as new and strange in 1930s East Asian society. As Walter Benjamin has pointed out, 'things' interact with human subjects and will, in the end, affect their consciousness.⁶ In this sense, cinema by displaying objects and creating mimetic experiences for the audience has functioned, from very early on, as a modernizing agent for East Asia.

The pace of modernization in East Asia picked up a decade after the Second World War. Cinema kept pace, as demonstrated by the *mise-en-scène* of its pictures. During the 1950s and 1960s the modern milieu of the city is composed of not only higher high-rises, but subways, flyovers, fancy automobiles, crowded traffic, tourists, migrants, hotels, airports, big shopping malls, bureaucrats, multinational corporations and banks. In Hong Kong a large number of films that focused on modern life began to appear in the 1950s and 1960s. Glamorous musicals (in imitation of Hollywood) and urban romances showed upper-class fashionable dress, air travel, nightclubs, and luxurious restaurants. This trend continued in the following decades and spread out to almost all (non-costume) genres, including the hugely popular gangster thrillers, which were internationalized as an update on the older gunfight genre in the 1990s.

A Better Tomorrow (1986) directed by John Wu is one of the best known trend-setting examples of the gangster thriller from Hong Kong New Cinema. It is famous for both its cityscape shots and its handsome young male protagonist (played by Chou Y.F.) engaged in daredevil gunfights in front of the most modernized central business area of the city. This film and later gunfight thrillers became extremely popular in South Korea and influenced the latter's cinema. During the late 1990s Korean cinema came out with gangster films of a similar kind: glamorized cities and good-looking young men in trench coats. *Shiri* (1999), celebrated as the first Hollywood-type big-budget Korean blockbuster, is explicitly styled after John Wu with the protagonist wearing the Chou Y.F.-type trench coat, highly sentimentalized background music, nostalgic talk between rivals about growing up together, gun fights showered with lots of shattered glass, swift pans, and slow motion during the climactic shoot-out scenes.

Mainland China's commercial cinema (versus art cinema) since the 1990s differs little in its projection of modern life. Much of the new popular cinema from China, Hong Kong, Korea, and sometimes even Japan looks so similar that it is hard to distinguish which city the stories are taking place in except by the characters' language. This aesthetic corresponds to the similarity of the actual cities in East Asia, creating a feeling of sameness, or 'déjà vu' (see Inuhiko). During the past ten years a fair number of co-productions between East Asian cinemas have even shared locations and movie stars, as in the Korea–Hong Kong co-production *My Wife is a Gangster* (2001). These 'trans-East Asian' productions contribute further to the sense of urban uniformity, at once eliciting a sense of universalism and an anxiety of mimicry.



Figure 3.1 Still shot from *A Better Tomorrow*. John Wu, dir. 1986.

MODERNIST THEMES AND LIBERAL THOUGHTS

While the *mise-en-scène* described above alludes to superficial similarities, the films' themes reflect differences. Modern reality consists not only of modern objects but, more importantly, modern sensibilities and consciousness. East Asia as a whole responded to significant issues in modernity. A number of themes tend to be shared among their cinemas, such as the colonial and post-colonial conditions, economic progress and exploitation, questions of the modern and the traditional, local versus global, and freedom versus authority. Each of the cinemas takes on these issues with different levels of engagement and from different perspectives.

Almost all East Asian countries have experienced some form of colonial domination. As a result, a post-colonial consciousness has arisen which has struggled to reassert new national self-definitions. In the cinema of Mainland China, historical stories of colonialist struggles constitute a genre almost all by itself. The opium wars, for example, are among those most represented on screen, with films titled *Opium War* appearing at least three times: 1943, 1959, and 1997.⁷

In Japan, anti-colonial films came out during the heyday of the New Wave (the 1960s to early 1970s). Films by Nagisa Oshima such as *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960) and *A Man Who Left His Will on Film* (1970), and Shohei Imamura's *Pigs and Battleships* (1961) are good examples. Oshima's films level a more direct protest against Japan's complacent relationship with the United States during the post-Second World War era, while Imamura's irreverent comedy describes the dark side of the immediate post-war Japanese society with the American presence as both backdrop and one of the factors in Japan's social malaise.

Korean films such as *Chilsu and Mansu* (1988), although focused on Korea's internal problems after its democratization during the 1980s, are skeptical if not resentful of Korea's relationship with the United States, including the latter's military presence after the war. The science fiction film *Lost Memories* (2009) clearly resents Japanese colonial domination over Korea. The story concerns a mysterious transformation of history in which the contemporary Korean peninsula is still part of imperial Japan. According to this new timeline Japan was part of the Allied forces, which defeated Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Most characters are not aware of this time shuffling. In the end, the protagonist, with the help of some underground Korean resistance fighters, reverts the timeline back to normal: Japan is found to be the aggressor in the war, and the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, not Berlin. Even though the narrative is pure imagination, the political connotation is not hard to see.

Taiwanese New Wave of the 1980s, one of the most impactful cinema movements in Asia, brought forth the most powerful and subversive anti-colonial protest. The New Wave began with two major strands of films. The first focused on the rewriting of the recent history of Taiwan by re-tracing the lived experience of the Taiwanese themselves (thus refuting the official China-centred historiography). The second focused on a fundamental re-evaluation of modern society, its forms of human interaction/relationship, lifestyle, values, and meaning of existence. The inaugural New Wave film, *A City of Sadness* (1989), expounds revisionist history in which the former colonialists – the Japanese – are not as fiercely criticized as the 'new colonialists', the mainlanders (Mainland Chinese), who fled communism and moved

to Taiwan only to create another authoritarian regime. Most significantly, this revisionist history is presented not via a narrow nativist/nationalist discourse, but rather through a modernist cosmopolitan view of popular memories and social justice, reflecting a much more modern consciousness than that shown in most of the East Asian cinemas at the time.

MODERNIZATION AND HUMANITY

Another trend of the Taiwanese New Wave, spearheaded by director Edward Yang, has a harsh critical view of the social, economic, and political reality of the modern age.⁸ Yang uses innovative narrative forms with a high level of realism that favours details over drama to describe how even though modernization brought in technological and material benefits, it replaced the tradition of a humane society with a utilitarian one. Yang's second feature, *The Terrorizers* (1986), is deeply concerned with the commercial corporate world and the materialism that distorts human relationships.

A major part of the Korean experience of modernization took place from the 1960s to 1980s under harsh pro-capitalist authoritarian governments, which mercilessly oppressed workers in the name of economic advancement. This part of Korean (forced) modernization, which was marked by violent protests and brutal suppression, is reflected in such well-known films as *Black Republic* (1990) and *A Single Spark* (1995). Both are stories of workers and protesters struggling under a dictatorial regime.

The most contemporary reflection on modernization and globalization is done no better than by the globally recognized Mainland Chinese director Jia Zhangke. While Mainland China's commercial screens are filled with signs of China's new economic success, almost all of Jia's features, from his debut film *Xiao Wu* (1997) to his recent work *A Touch of Sin* (2013) are detailed depictions of the devastating effects, especially the emotional effects, of globalization and commercialization on ordinary people. His films address some of the most pressing issues of contemporary modernity, such as migration, cultural dislocation, work alienation, family dispersion, economic exploitation, corruption, environmental destruction, class (rural-urban) and sexual discrimination. *A Touch of Sin*, which was made with almost a documentary truthfulness, shows the violent dehumanization of a society in which material possessions become the highest goal of life.

The expression of modernism in Hong Kong cinema has also made headway since the New Wave of the early 1980s. Modernist sensibilities manifest in films that turn to personal experience and take an interest in the ordinary rather than the novel. *Father and Son* (1981) portrays the filmmaker's experience of growing up in a low-income housing estate. The protagonist rebels against one of the most sacred social rules within the traditional Chinese patriarchal system: paternal authority.

No sooner had 1980s Hong Kong cinema redefined Hong Kong identity than a new identity quest began in the 1990s as the anxiety over the coming reannexation with China hit home. *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) has always been considered, especially by Western critics, to have started a series of nostalgia pictures that dwell on a sense of uncertainty if not loss of Hong Kong identity in the eve of reannexation. Unwilling to be constrained by a traditional nationalistic Chinese identity, Hong Kong sees itself as a significant major centre of world trade. Issues of localism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, flexible identity, and diasporic experience appear with

narratives set in cities such as Buenos Aires, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Paris, London, Sydney, and Tokyo. *Happy Together* (1997), *Tokyo Raiders* (2000), and the entire series of Jacky Chan films from late 1990s to the mid 2000s exemplify this trend.

The 1990s marked an interesting time in Japanese cinema, labelled by some as a third golden age. After over two decades of hiatus, Japanese cinema of the 1990s broke out with a number of younger filmmakers who did not follow traditional studio apprenticeships. They came from different backgrounds such as journalism, advertising, novel writing, and pop arts. They made films that reflected a new sensibility, comfortable with a world that was open to differences and changes and not obsessed with differentiating ‘authentic’ Japanese experience or finding a ‘pure’ Japanese identity.

The wildly popular film *Shall We Dance* (1996), an obvious reference to the Hollywood film *The King and I*, begins with a typical ‘salary man’ riding a train home every day late at night, exhausted and depressed. One day, from a jam-packed train carriage he sees a woman standing at the window of her dance studio. He is intrigued by the idea of learning to dance. Western dancing (in this case ballroom dance) is considered very ‘un-Japanese’ because it comes from the West and requires public expression of emotion. It challenges the protagonist’s psychology, but he finally overcomes his inhibitions. Dancing transforms him from a wooden, robotic man living an unimaginative suburban life into a revitalized creative person. The film unabashedly uses the most memorable line from the Hollywood musical *The King and I* as its title and the latter’s theme song as its own theme music. It clearly recognizes the positive influence of the outside world and is not interested in essentializing Japanese culture.

The ever-growing influx of immigrants from other Asian nations is yet another modern issue that generates anxiety for Japan. Immigration is not uncommon in other parts of East Asia, but due to Japan’s strong tradition of insularity there is much tension regarding the issue. For example, in the past it was very difficult for other Asian immigrants to obtain Japanese citizenship even after living in Japan for a few generations, and those who were granted citizenship had to change their names into Japanese. In cinema, before the 1970s ‘foreign’ residents of Japan were rarely shown on screen. But as Tokyo has become more and more internationalized in the last two decades there has been pressure to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Japanese society. A number of films appearing since the early 1990s express this modern sensibility. *All Under the Moon* (1993), a story about Koreans and Filipinos in Japan, was a major box office hit and marked a new beginning in deconstructing the myth of ethnic purity of Japan. In *Go* (2002) romantic love between a young Korean resident and a Japanese woman is interrupted by racism. When the girl realizes that her friend is not a ‘real’ Japanese she panics and leaves him until near the end of the film when she realizes her mistake and returns to his side.

MODERNIST FORM

It is not uncommon for popular cinema East or West to depict modernist themes while not employing a modernist form. Less common is the example of Nagasi Oshima from Japan and Wong Kar Wai from Hong Kong,⁹ who made popular films with modernist cinematic form. Although they are from different periods and with different sentiments behind their use of modernist form – Oshima more political and

anti-traditional and Wong more personal and emotional in expression and style – the cinematic languages that they created are specific and reflexive.

Oshima's *A Man Who Left His Will on Film* (1970) is clearly self-reflexive, using experimental non-diegetic sound, which does not match the images, to comment on the images themselves. The film begins with a young man, who is a political activist, jumping to his death with his camera after he shoots some footage of a protest and is chased by the police. The rest of the film concerns his girlfriend's search for the reason for his suicide. In various places the film uses subjective shots from the perspective of different characters including what seems to be the dead man's. It makes references to the filmmaking process and uses documentary footage of real-life protests with a personal voice-over to describe personal experiences, which may not match what one sees on screen. It is not always clear what actually has happened, or whether the girlfriend's search is real or fictitious since it depends on memories which change when circumstances change. The film is clearly not a classical story designed to 'tell' the audience what happens. Rather, it questions how filmmaking can or cannot help in the struggle for freedom – whether the camera can in fact be the gun.¹⁰ In doing so, Oshima affirms as well as questions the power of images in fighting the status quo or even creating revolutions.

Wong Kar Wai's work has a particular visual style that also encourages if not demands self-reflection. Time and space play definitive roles in his narrative, which is fragmented, episodic, and elliptical rather than following a linear sequence of cause and effects. Beginning with *Chungking Express* (1994) all of his films use this 'disjointed' style to tell stories. His themes of loss and longing, dislocation in time and space, a lost opportunity that will never come back, memory and disenchantment are expressed as much via images as narrative. His images are infused with memory and emotions. He uses ordinary things from daily life – a cramped apartment, a pair of slippers (*In the Mood for Love*, 2000), a phone booth outside of a small fast food joint, a flight ticket soaked in rain (*Chungking Express*), a postcard of the Iguazu



Figure 3.2 Still shot from *Chungking Express*. Wong Kar Wai, dir. 1994.

waterfalls (*Happy Together*), and so forth. Deep emotion is found not in high drama but in small gestures: a glance, a small step back from a lover, half a sentence uttered, unfinished conversations, and such. His editing style supports such a ‘disjointed’ sensation with jump cuts, freeze-frames, or his now famous stop-motion, as if he wants to contemplate something even in the midst of fast action, such as in the midst of a fight in the martial arts film *Ashes of Time* (1994).

LOOKING AHEAD

East Asian films have been responding to Western modernism with their own sensibility, energy, and subjectivity from the advent of cinema. Looking ahead, one can see new areas of inquiry taking shape. Since the 1990s Taiwanese cinema has adopted a much more liberal attitude towards the portrayal of sexuality on screen. Younger Taiwanese filmmakers such as Tsai Ming-liang continue the critique of Taiwan modernization but with a view on gender issues. His films *Vive L’amour* (1994), *The River* (1997), and *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003) normalize homosexuality and push for a society of freedom and equality. *Spider Lilies* (2007) by Zero Chou is a Taiwanese lesbian film that has gained the highest international acclaim. It won the Teddy Award for best gay feature film in the Berlin International Film Festival.¹¹ Since 2000 South Korea has hosted the Seoul LGBT Film Festival each year, showcasing international and Korean films with LGBT themes. Films such as *No Regret* (2006), the first Korean gay film, and *Crush and Blush* (2008) were highly popular. Japanese cinema, which was known for its ‘pink film’ genre of the 1960s, has seen a resurgence of gay films during the 1980s and 1990s. Oshima re-emerged after 13 years to make *Gohatto* (1999), a film on homosexuality set in feudal Japan. The Japanese film *Manji*, which first appeared in the 1960s, reappeared in the 1980s and 1990s, and was remade in 2006. It is a story of love between women. *Beautiful Mystery* (1983) and *Muscle* (1989) connect Japanese militarism and overt nationalism with the oppression of homosexuality. Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s also began to openly speak about LGBT sexuality. Wong Kar Wai’s *Happy Together* and Stanley Kwan’s *Hold You Tight* (1998) are two well-known examples.¹² Yau Ching’s *Ho Yuk: Let’s Love Hong Kong* (2002) represents the first openly lesbian Hong Kong narrative film. In Mainland China Zhang Yuen’s first openly gay film *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) caused him much trouble from the government authority, but it has led to a flourishing underground LGBT filmmaking scene with its own festival.

A new epoch of liberality has arrived in East Asia since the 1990s, in which one of the last taboo topics, sexuality, has gained its place in a modernist understanding of the human. At this point one can only project that this trend of opening up and exploring new frontiers will continue.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the term ‘*mo deng*’ see Lee.
2. The “modern” was related but not considered as a direct cause of conflicts in the movement. For an understanding of the complex struggle involved in the Cultural Revolution see Chen.

3. See Lau, 'Besides Fists and Blood: Michael Hui and Cantonese Comedy', in Fu and Desser (eds).
4. Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking was the forerunner of HSBC, the biggest international bank in the world today.
5. Japanese cinema consists of two major genres: *jidai-geki* (period dramas), and *gendai-geki* (films set in contemporary time).
6. W. Benjamin has extensive discussion on cityscape, arcades, and commodity fetishism. See Gilloch.
7. See Xiao.
8. See 'Remapping Taipei', in Jameson.
9. Other examples include Hong Kong directors Tsui Hark for his genre mixing and Patrick Tam for his modernist visual aesthetic used to reflect on a modern materialist/consumer/image culture.
10. 'The camera as a gun' is a metaphor used in the Third Cinema movement in the 1960s in Latin America. The camera, or cinema for that matter, was considered a weapon that could create a cultural offensive. See Burton. Oshima's story shares as well as questions such a notion.
11. This is not to say that homosexuality was not expressed in East Asian media (including theatrical dramas and literatures) before. But modern screen presentations have a stronger political connotation and a humanistic concern.
12. See Marchetti.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MODERN DANCE IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



Jukka O. Miettinen

In the Asian context, the term ‘modern dance’ is problematic. Firstly, the generic term ‘dance’ is not known in all Asian languages, as different dance or dance-drama genres and their performers have their own specific names. It is not always possible to classify the stage arts as either nonverbal ‘dance’ or spoken ‘theatre’. Secondly, in the West, many modern dance pioneers rejected the conventions of classical ballet, whereas in Asia there was no ballet tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In several Asian countries, ballet and modernist dance were received side by side as foreign novelties. In the strictest meaning of the term, ‘modern dance’ thus refers only to those artists who were in direct contact with the Western modernist dance movement, either by being able to see actual performances or by studying with Western teachers. This definition is, however, very narrow, since in a wider sense the modernization, which is practically interchangeable with the westernization within the context of dance, started earlier in Asia than the modern dance movement evolved in Europe and in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

To understand the various expressions of modern dance in East and Southeast Asia, it is necessary to be familiar with the whole modernization/westernization process in the six countries to be discussed. In East Asia these countries include Japan, China, and Korea, and in Southeast Asia the Philippines, Thailand (formerly Siam), and Indonesia. The Philippines were the first of the Asian countries to be colonized in the early sixteenth century, by Spain, while Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch in the early seventeenth century. In these countries, the colonizers initiated the modernization process. Korea’s complicated history will be discussed later. Thailand, China, and Japan, on the other hand, were never under direct Western rule, and their westernization process was more or less voluntary. Japan and Thailand went through westernization processes at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century when Japan’s Meiji Restoration and Siam’s Chakri Reforms opened the doors to the West and some of its artistic expressions.

The cultural flow was not only between the East and the West. Influences also circulated within Asia. One important phenomenon during the 1920s and 1930s, for

instance, was the so-called pan-Asian movement, which meant, in the field of dance, that some artists from various Asian countries studied each other's traditions (Cohen 2010: 174, 186). The great international exhibitions and fairs in Europe and in the United States were crucial for the East–West flow. The first one was organized in London in 1851, and other Western nations followed its example. As the period was the peak of Western imperialism, colonies were also ordered to participate. A growing need to lure visitors led the organizers to transport dancers from the colonies to provide entertainment (Décoret-Ahiha 2004: 19–48). The impact of Asia on Western artists is a well-known phenomenon. There was also a mirror effect; the visiting artists and their impresarios became familiar with the Western proscenium stage, lighting techniques, and the tastes of local audiences. Many of them brought this knowledge back to Asia and utilized it in their own work, thus paving the way for modern dance.

The West–East flow intensified when Western companies started to tour Asia. The Denishawn company toured Asia for 15 months in 1925–6, visiting Japan, China, Burma, Indonesia, Ceylon, Malaya, Java, and the Philippines. After the Second World War, the superpowers also started to spread their cultural influence. For instance, Soviet ballet was adopted in the People's Republic of China from the early 1950s. This later led, during the Cultural Revolution, to a totally new sub-genre of ballet, the Revolutionary Ballet. As fears intensified that Asia would turn Communist, the United States started to promote its culture in the region. In 1955 the US State Department sent Martha Graham and her dance company to perform and teach in 16 Asian cities (Prevots 1998: 44–51). This strategy proved successful; several Asian dancers later went to New York to study with Graham and even to perform in her company, thus learning her style with its focus on the centre of the body and emphasis on floor movements. The flow of leading American dance companies continued for decades. It spread the extroverted and athletic American modernism to countries that had their own, often restrained and meditative traditions focusing on subtle gesture language rather than on dynamic leaps and lifts.

Another source of influence was pre-Second World War Germany, with which Japan had close political ties. From Japan, the influence of German *Ausdruckstanz*, the expressionist style of Mary Wigman and Harald Kreuzberg, spread further to China and Korea. The style was characterized by almost grotesque exaggeration and intensive emotions. Gradually, in the 1970s, various international festivals started to provide a new type of forum for intercultural exchange.

One of the features of Western modernism was its emphasis on individualism. In Asia, individualism was not encouraged in most of the local, centuries-old indigenous traditions, which have, however, served as the basis for several Asian artists working in the field of modern dance. The various strategies of negotiation between the indigenous traditions and modernist tendencies seem to be one reason for the present pluralism and richness of Asia's contemporary dance scene.

JAPAN

The Italian ballet master and choreographer Giovanni V. Rossi, who worked in Tokyo from 1912 to 1918, introduced both Western ballet and modern dance to Japan. His students included Ishii Baku, who had an important role during the first

phase of modern dance in Japan. Ishii's influence spread to other East Asian countries through his Chinese and Korean pupils. He created his early works under the influence of Isadora Duncan and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. While touring Europe, Ishii became influenced by the expressionist style of Mary Wigman and her student Harald Kreuzberg, who visited Japan in 1924. Close political contacts allowed several Japanese pre-Second World War dancers to study in Germany, some with Mary Wigman herself. They included Eguchi Takaya, Miya Misako, Shigyo Masatoshi, and Kuni Masami (Ichikawa 1998: 590). Among the early international modernists was Ito Michio, who had studied at the Dalcroze Institute. He performed widely in Europe and in the United States, working with artists like Martha Graham and W. B. Yeats, with whom he created a *nō*-inspired piece, *At the Hawk's Well*, in 1915. After the Second World War, he returned to Japan and founded his own school (Décoret-Ahiha 2004: 212).

Many of the above-mentioned artists were influenced by Western techniques and aesthetics, but Fujikage Shizue's approach was completely different. She was a geisha, with a background in the Japanese tradition. In 1917 she founded the Toin Kai troupe and created modern dances based on *kabuki*, a traditionally all-male form of popular theatre with its own dance genre. Her stage dress was a kimono. She, however, often used Western music. After her successful trip to Paris in 1928, her style became even more Western-influenced. Several other Japanese modernists have used traditional Japanese techniques in their choreographies. This feature continues, for example, in Matsui Akira's fusion works of Japanese and Western techniques. His background is in the traditional, almost minimalistic *nō* theatre, which had been strictly closed to outside influences for centuries. After the Second World War, Japan experienced a boom in ballet and American modern dance. The latter was heralded by the Martha Graham Company's visit in the 1950s. It was followed by visits from other major American dance companies, and many Japanese dancers, such as Kimura Yuriko, Kanda Akiko, and Asakawa Takako went to study in the United States (Ichikawa 1998: 591).

Butō, a new and later internationally widespread form of Japanese modern dance, evolved in the 1960s and the early 1970s during the politically stormy period of student riots and experimental performances. Its founder, Hijikata Tatsumi, studied various styles and techniques, among them the German expressionist *Ausdruckstanz*, under several Japanese teachers, such as Ishii Baku. Hijikata wanted to distance himself from Western dance aesthetics, however. He began his career with such revolutionary performances that his relationship with the Japanese mainstream dance world collapsed. His technique was crystallized in collaboration with other, so-called first generation *butō* artists, Ohno Kazuo and Kasai Akira. *Butō* got its early characteristics; the dancer's almost naked body was covered with white make-up, while the spasmodic movements echoed German expressionism. Later, several branches of *butō* evolved; for example, the 'country *butō*', with Tanaka Min as its main exponent, and more urban *butō*, often with bizarre overtones or with highly aesthetic staging, such as in the productions of Amagatsu Ushio's troupe, Sankai Juku. In the context of contemporary dance, this visually polished style has been continued by Teshigawara Saburō.

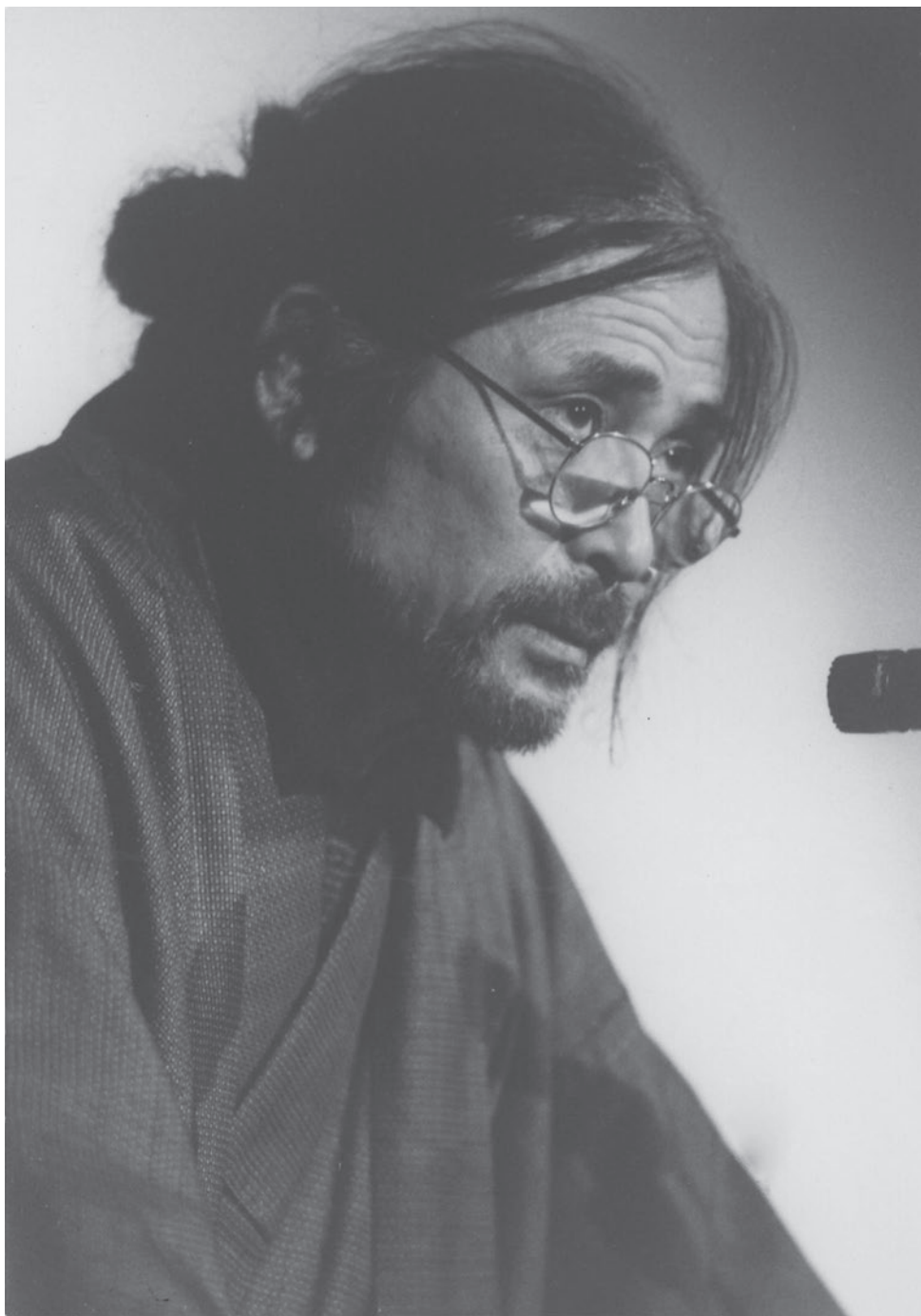


Figure 4.1 Hijikata Tatsumi. Photographer: Masuda Daisuke. Photo courtesy of Hijikata Tatsumi Archive at Keio University Art Center.

CHINA

Western dancers and companies, such as the American Denishawn, performed in China as early as the 1920s. The pioneer of modern dance in China, Wu Xiaobang, known as the ‘Father of China’s New Dance Art’, however, studied the German expressionist style in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. Wu founded his ‘New Dance Movement’, but it was only appreciated by a few intellectuals. During the war against Japan (1937–45), Wu joined the patriotic movement. His choreography *March of the Volunteers*, for example, was composed to a melody that became the national anthem of the People’s Republic of China. In his highly emotional and clearly expressionist works, he concentrated on themes related to Chinese history. He also developed his own teaching system based on Rudolf Laban’s ‘Choreutical’ methods. He believed that dance education could correct society. During the early People’s Republic, Wu was able to experiment with his small group and to continue his research into the history of Chinese dance. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) he was persecuted for his individualist tendencies and his interest in historical themes, though later he was allowed to continue his work (Ou Jian-Ping 1998: 145).



Figure 4.2 Wu Xiaobang performing his solo *Fire of Hunger*.

The early phase of the People's Republic, starting from its establishment in 1949, was an active time for the arts as they were employed in the construction of the new society. Mao Zedong's policies became the guidelines for all the arts, which were now appreciated for their educative value. Committees were formed and festivals held to define the role of the arts in the new society. In 1950 it was agreed that even the traditional art forms should be reformed so that they would promote Communist ideology and revolutionary heroism. Modern dance was rejected for its individualism and because it was seen as a form of Western, particularly American, imperialism. Another Western import, ballet, however, was deemed suitable to serve the new society.

When Anna Pavlova toured China in the 1920s, ballet was already being taught in the Western concessions of international cities. The close political and cultural ties with the Soviet Union in the 1950s and the founding of the Beijing Dance School in 1954 brought a steady flow of Russian ballet teachers to China. It was, however, officially decided that ballet should be adapted to Chinese conditions. The dancer and choreographer who showed the way in combining Western and Chinese elements was Dai Ailian. She had studied ballet and modern dance in Europe, particularly in London, under Anton Dolin, Rudolf Laban, and Mary Wigman. After her return to China in 1939, she started to perform her own short, patriotic solo pieces using elements of Chinese folk dances. After the People's Republic was founded, she became the leading figure on the dance scene. She created ballet-based works in which she utilized Chinese folklore and even acrobatics, thus starting a long-lasting tradition of Chinese modern ballet (Zi Huayun 1999: 110–12).

During the Cultural Revolution, most forms of the performing arts were prohibited. The new repertoire, approved by the party, included only eight works, regularly revised by the party committees to reflect the current political trends. They were the five model operas, one symphony, and two model ballets, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl*. Revolutionary ballets made full use of rigid black-and-white stereotypes and Soviet-style heroic classical ballet with *pointe* shoes and daring leaps.

China's opening-up in the early 1970s and the 1980s gradually changed the cultural climate. The first class in modern dance opened in Guangdong Province in 1987. Four years later, modern techniques were included in the curriculum of the Beijing Dance Institute. The first modern dance group was the Guangdong Modern Dance Company, supported among others by the American Dance Festival. After 1980, several Chinese dancers were able to study abroad, particularly in the United States (Ou Jian-Ping 1998: 146). Among them was Jin Xing, who had received his basic ballet training in the People's Liberation Army. After his long period in the West, he returned to China and underwent a sex reassignment operation. She founded her own, privately funded company, first in Beijing and later in Shanghai. As an influential public figure, she is now the leading promoter of contemporary dance in China.

KOREA

The development of South Korean dance in the twentieth century has been dominated by two, apparently contradictory, trends. The Western influence has been adopted and adapted enthusiastically, while, at the same time, serious attempts have been

made to study and revive original forms of Korean dance. The intensive search for a national identity is understandable because of the historical and political circumstances. Korea underwent the Japanese occupation in 1910–45. Later, the superpowers divided the country into North Korea and South Korea. New concepts have been coined, such as ‘creative dance’, meaning new kinds of choreographies employing various techniques, and ‘creative Korean dance’, referring to basically Korean forms of dance, although modernized and often adapted for large stages (Kim Kyoung-ae 1997: 184).

In the early twentieth century there evolved a pre-modern genre of Korean dance, the *kyabang* dances, performed by professional entertainers. The most popular of these dances, the hypnotic *Salpuri* and the semi-ritualistic *Monk’s Dance*, were created by a famous dancer, Han Song-jun (Kim Kyoung-ae 1997: 178). They were based on traditional material, although they are suitable to be performed on a modern stage. Western-influenced modernism had its triumph when the Japanese expressionist dancer Ishii Baku visited Korea in the 1920s. A group of Korean dancers followed Ishii to Japan to study with him. Among them was Ch’oi Seung-hee, who started to combine Western and Korean elements according to Ishii’s advice. Ch’oi Seung-hee made a successful two-year tour in the West, during which she was able to absorb more elements from Western modernism. Later, she moved to North Korea where she was hailed as the creator of the North Korean modern dance style (Décoret-Ahiha 2004: 216; Kim Kyoung-ae 1997: 180).

The Graham technique was introduced to South Korea by the founder of the local modern dance association, Yuk Wan-sun, who had studied with Graham in New York (Kim Tae-won 1997: 186). Hong Sin-cha, who had studied with Alwin Nikolaïs and Meredith Monk, led her own company, the Laughing Stone, in New York until 1990, after which she returned to Korea. University dance departments have widely propagated ‘creative Korean dance’, besides ballet and modern techniques. Several choreographers have been active in this field, such as Mun Il-jo, Kwi-ja, and Kim Mae-ja and her Chang Mu Company. With its festivals and several experimental groups, the contemporary dance scene in South Korea is flourishing.

PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, the early Western influence, which arrived via Spanish colonizers, can still be recognized in the melodies and steps of some folk dances as well as in traditional social dances. After the American colonization at the turn of the twentieth century, ballet and modern dance reached the country. Anna Pavlova, for example, toured there in 1922, after which the first ballet schools were founded, and Denishawn introduced American modernism in 1925. Among the early visitors was also a group specializing in German expressionism. The generally felt need to preserve and revitalize Filipino national identity was the reason why Leonor Oroso Coquingco founded her company Filipinesca in 1962. Since then, folklore, combined with modernist tendencies, has become the mainstream of Filipino dance. Numerous companies, among them the Banyanihan Company and several university groups around the country, have continued to modernize folklore through dance.

The School Studio Dance Group, founded in the 1950s by Ricardo and Roberta Cassel, served as a springboard for many future dancers and choreographers. The

early modernists include, for example, Carmen Ferrer Adevosio, Manolo Rosado, and Corazon Generoso Inigo. Later American and French influences further stimulated developments. Rosalio Merino Santos established the Far Eastern University Modern Experimental Dance Group, and later Ballet Philippines established its own experimental group, the Cultural Center of the Philippines group. Other ballet companies, such as the Philippine Ballet Theatre, have also encouraged choreographers to create a modern repertoire (Alejandro 1998: 171–74).

INDONESIA

The Western influence in Indonesia was first felt in two of its many dance cultures, those of the islands of Java and Bali. Java's ceremonial and meditative classical dance genres had been guarded treasures of the courts. In 1918, when the island was still under Dutch colonial rule, the first dance society, Kridha Baksa Wirama, was founded in Yogyakarta to teach court dances to all, regardless of social class. Many first-generation modernists studied there. In the 1950s, the new nation, composed of hundreds of ethnic groups, sought its own identity, which was also reflected in dance. The new, nationalistic organizations followed the model of the European socialist countries in transforming old folk traditions into new, 'mass-oriented' variants, such as the *Peasant's Dance*, the *Tea-Pickers' Dance*, and the *Fishermen's Dance*. The traditional Central Javanese dance-drama, *wayang wong*, was modernized in the early 1960s. The result, *sendratari*, is a spectacular combination of traditional Javanese dance styles and modern stage techniques. It was mainly intended for both Javanese and foreign tourists (Soedarsono 1974: 56–7).

Western ballet had already found its way to Java in the 1940s, mainly through Dutch ballet teachers. A decade later, modern dance started to interest young Indonesian artists. One of the pioneers was Jodjana. Although he was trained in classical dance, his works focused on self-expression. Another pioneer, Seti-Arti Kailola, went to study in New York with Martha Graham, who visited Java in 1955. In Jakarta, Seti-Arti set up her own school, thus establishing the long-lasting link between the Graham technique and Indonesian modernism. The Graham technique was further explored by Bagong Kussudiardja and Wisnoe Wardhana, who established their own dance studios by the end of the 1950s.

Another influential pioneer of modern dance, who also studied in New York, is Sardono W. Kusumo. While he created clearly modern works, he also maintained the traditional Javanese body conception and dance technique with its emphasis on delicate gestures. He established his own Sardono Dance Theatre in 1973. He has worked with artists and styles from all over Indonesia and has thus been instrumental in introducing the experiments and innovations later made around the country.

Several governmental institutions founded since the 1960s have had a decisive role in the development of different forms of dance. The establishment of the Jakarta Arts Centre, Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) in 1968 provided an arena for contemporary as well as traditional arts. Further forums have been provided by the Jakarta Arts Institute, opened in 1970, and by the Young Choreographers' Festival, founded in 1978 (Sedyawati 1999: 112–19).

BALI

The twentieth century brought an end to the isolated tranquillity of Bali as influences began to flow from the West and the island of Java. After the Dutch colonization of Bali in 1908, the traditional central court in eastern Bali lost its former importance, and the focus of culture partly moved to North Bali, around the Dutch colonial centre of Singaraja. New gamelan music and dance clubs were established and their competition led to a cultural renaissance in the 1910s to 1930s. The most sensational novelty was the dynamic, almost feverish style of gamelan and dance called *kebyar*. One of its creators, I Nyoman Mario, was greatly admired by both the Balinese and foreigners living on the island.

Over the decades, Westerners had an increasing influence on the development of Balinese dance. Dutch colonial officials were, in some cases, patrons of the renaissance of North Balinese performing arts, and the German-born painter and composer, Walter Spies, who settled in the small town of Ubud in southern Bali, was in many ways instrumental in reshaping Balinese arts. Among the Western artists residing in Bali, mainly in the village of Ubud, were the Mexican painter Miquel Covarrubias and his wife, Rose, who actively documented Balinese dance and theatre. With his writings and documentation the Canadian composer Colin McPhee proved important in popularizing Balinese music and dance in the West.

The impact of early tourism, the Western art colony, and the first visits of Balinese dancers to Europe influenced Balinese dance in several ways. To attract tourists, dances were shortened, and completely new dance numbers were also created, particularly for the Paris Colonial Exhibition in 1931. The creator of some new dances was I Nyoman Mario, and Bali's Western artists sometimes participated in their fashioning. Hybrid forms were also created. In this connection, *kecak*, a new type of dance, evolved and has found an established place in the Balinese standard repertoire. It combines ancient trance ritual with scenes from the Ramayana Epic. Since the 1970s, several new versions of *kecak* have been created, one of them being the all-female *kecak*, which had its premiere in the Bali Arts Festival, in 2004 (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 93). It is only one example of Bali's 'soft' modernism, which, while being open to experiments and to outside influences, still firmly communicates with the indigenous tradition.

THAILAND

For centuries the hyper elegant, gesture-based classical style of Central Thailand's court has dominated Thai dance, dictating the standards according to which other dance styles have been adapted and developed. The economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, however, limited the court's resources for maintaining expensive forms of dance-drama. A decisive turn of events occurred in 1932, when Thailand became a constitutional monarchy. This signified a break between the court and traditional dance, which subsequently was placed under the authority of the government's Fine Arts Department. The old court traditions came to be regarded as national art. Western influences were limited mainly to the adaption of the proscenium stage, three-dimensional stage settings and modern lighting methods (Rutnin 1993: 221–6).

As in many other Southeast Asian countries, the contacts with Western modernism were heralded by visiting companies from the West, such as the Martha Graham Company in the mid 1950s, followed by the companies of Merce Cunningham, Alvin Ailey, and Alwin Nikolais, among others. Even in the 1970s, ballet and modern dance were still taught only in a few private dance schools. The first Thai dancer who made an early career in the West is Naraphong Charassri. With a background in classical Thai dance, he went to study at the Royal Ballet School in London in 1980, from where he catapulted as a dancer to several important, contemporary companies (Miettinen 2002: 4–18). Back in Thailand he continues to work as a contemporary choreographer while also utilizing the Thai tradition.

For decades, the Patravadi Theatre, founded by the actress Patravadi Mejudhon, has provided a stage for contemporary Thai arts as well as for an international dance festival. Later, the Bangkok International Festival of Dance and Music served as a forum for visiting groups. Several smaller festivals have further enriched Thailand's dance scene. Thailand's internationally best-known dancer-choreographer is probably Pichet Klungchung, who often includes elements of Thai dance, such as nuanced hand and arm movements, in his works.

In general, until the 1970s and the 1980s, Asian dancer-choreographers were keen to learn and absorb Western dance techniques and aesthetics, either by directly studying with Western teachers or at least by adding Western components to their works. There were, however, also examples of indigenous modernism, such as the *kebyar* tradition of Bali and *kyobang* dances of Korea. In the 1980s an increasing number of Western artists started to study in Asia or with Asian teachers. Thus, the cultural flow between East and West became more varied and balanced. Plenty of scholarship has been devoted to definitions such as 'cross-cultural', 'multicultural', 'cultural pluralism', 'intercultural', 'fusion', 'hybrid', etc. Asian contemporary dance no longer relies predominantly on Western influence. On the contrary, the re-evaluation of indigenous classical and folk forms, or even martial arts techniques, in the international contemporary context seems to be the prevailing trend in many Asian countries.

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CHAPTER FIVE

MODERNIST LITERARY PRODUCTION IN EAST ASIA

—♦—
Karen Thornber

East Asian literary modernism (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan) spans much of the twentieth century, flourishing in the 1920s to 1930s. Like their counterparts in other regions, East Asian modernist texts tend to be somewhat fragmented, characterized by experiments with language and style that signal rupture from established forms. They also regularly grapple with psychological investigation, and with the erotic and exotic as they penetrate contemporary, even chaotic, ‘modern’ urban milieus replete with cutting-edge architecture, consumer goods, and media phenomena (especially cinema, popular music, and the modern girl/boy), technology, and transportation. Many East Asian modernist texts feature young, uprooted, self-conscious individuals with fractured subjectivity caught up in history, especially Japanese imperialism.¹ East Asian literary modernism often overlapped with realist and leftist creative output, many writers adopting a variety of styles in their careers and even within particular works.

Western scholars long posited East Asian literary modernism as derivative of European and American predecessors, which ironically often invoke and misuse – if not abuse – Asia.² However, in recent years scholars have come to understand the region’s modernist writings instead as engaged with contemporary domestic phenomena (the rapid changes taking place within the various nations of East Asia), and with one another, as part of the intra-East Asian circulation of texts, languages, and peoples commencing at the turn of the twentieth century (Thornber 2009). Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese writers were drawn to Western modernisms, but they were not dependent on them and at times were among their harshest critics.

This chapter introduces some of East Asia’s most celebrated modernist texts: from Japan, Yokomitsu Riichi’s *Shanghai* (*Shanghai*, 1931); from China, Mu Shiyong’s ‘Shanghai de hubuwu’ (‘Shanghai Foxtrot’, 1932); from Korea, Yi Sang’s ‘Nalgae’ (‘Wings’, 1936); and from Taiwan, Yang Chichang’s ‘Moeru hoo’ (‘Burning Cheeks’, 1935).³

SHANGHAI

Japanese literary modernism was inaugurated in 1910 with the publication of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's 'Shisei' ('The Tattooer'), but modernism did not take off until the early 1920s, under the auspices of such new literary groups as the Shin kankakuha (new sensationalists); journals such as *Shi to shiron* (*Poetry and Poetics*, est. 1928); prose writers including the widely translated Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Edogawa Ranpo, Hayashi Fumiko, Itō Sei, Kataoka Teppe, Kitasono Katsue, Satō Haruo, Yokomitsu, and Nobel Prize winner Kawabata Yasunari; and poets including Hagiwara Kyōjirō, Haruyama Yukio, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, and Nishiwaki Junzaburō. Modernism atrophied in Japan after the 1937 invasion of China, when many writers turned to propaganda, but it resurfaced after the Second World War with such celebrated figures as Abé Kōbō, Mishima Yukio, and Nobel Prize winner Ōe Kenzaburō (Tyler 2008: 55).⁴

China, particularly Shanghai, captured modernists' imaginations throughout Asia and beyond. Shanghai was China's largest and the world's fifth-largest city, a cosmopolitan semi-colonial metropolis with a strong foreign presence.⁵ Many modernists travelled there, including Yokomitsu Riichi in 1928. Yokomitsu's *Shanghai*, which began serialization shortly after his return from China, is set amid the turbulence of the May Thirtieth Incident (1925), when workers in Shanghai, outraged by their compatriots' murder at a Japanese textile mill, went on a massive strike. Focusing on a group of Japanese expatriates, *Shanghai* addresses many of the political and social crises facing East Asia in the mid 1920s, and depicts the city as a turbulent cesspool. As Gregory Golley argues:

The confluence [...] of flesh and matter [in *Shanghai*] offers a grim parody on the sensory shock and material proliferation of modernity, unveiling the final ignominious phase of the chaotic process of production and consumption: the story of decay, of exhaustion, and, finally, of disposal.

(Golley 2008: 135–6)

Moreover, as Seiji Lippit has commented, Yokomitsu's

descriptions contain elements of both exoticism and filth that typically characterized representations of the rest of Asia for domestic Japanese consumption [...] the Chinese (and other Asian workers) in the novel are portrayed in nonhuman terms as vegetation, animals, and waste.

(Lippit 2002: 84)

Shanghai centres on Sanki, a Japanese bank employee who wanders the city after losing his job, and Osugi, a Japanese bathhouse hostess who becomes a prostitute living in its slums. It features three topographies – the colonial city (flashing lights and dance halls), the revolutionary city (crowds, factories, and waves), and the slum city (stagnant water, waste, and darkness) – each housing a different female character (Miyako, Qiulan, and Osugi). Sanki moves through them, from the city's surface to its depths (Maeda Ai 1989: 281), although all three spaces are intertwined for much of *Shanghai*. Yokomitsu's experiments with literary language are not as dramatic in

Shanghai as in many of his earlier works, but his vivid visual descriptions, and detailed yet detached evocations of the tumultuous semi-colonial metropolis, innovatively amalgamate realism and modernism.

The novel opens with a description of the Huangpu River, the last major tributary of the Yangzi:

At high tide the river swelled and flowed backward. Prows of darkened motorboats lined up in a wave pattern. A row of rudders drawn up. Mountains of off-loaded cargo. The black legs of a wharf bound in chains. A signal showing calm winds raised atop a weather station tower. A customs house spire dimly visible through evening fog. Coolies on barrels stacked on the embankment, becoming soaked in the damp air. A black sail, torn and tilted, creaking along, adrift on brackish waves.

(Yokomitsu 2001: 3)⁶

All seems well. The river is swollen and flowing backward, yet the motorboats move in orderly fashion, chained to the wharf. Evening fog has set in, blurring the spire of the customs house, but the weather signal remains visible. Cargo is plentiful and the winds are calm. Suddenly soaked coolies enter, manifesting the human cost of commerce. Somewhere a torn and tilted black sail wanders, indicating the plight of many in the city, including Sanki, who appears next, returning to the Bund, sitting briefly with some Russian prostitutes, complaining that he has neither money nor country, and then, after the women leave '[disappearing] among the barrels', thinking about his mother and his own despondency (Yokomitsu 2001: 4).

Just as chapter one's ending delves into Sanki's consciousness, chapter two's opening penetrates Shanghai's topography:

A district of crumbling brick buildings. Some Chinese, wearing long-sleeved black robes that were swollen and stagnant like kelp in the depths of the ocean, crowded together on a narrow street. A beggar groveled on the pebble-covered road [...] And next to [the fruit stand] a port butcher. Skinned carcasses, suspended hoof-down, formed a flesh-colored grotto with a vague, dark recess from which the white point of a clock face sparked like an eye.

(Yokomitsu 2001: 7)

Here the camera moves in quickly – from a district of crumbling buildings to crowds of Chinese, weighed down by robes, and then to a single grovelling beggar. At the butcher's, dead bodies form a fleshy cave, within which an eye appears to sparkle.

As Dennis Washburn has observed,

In order to represent the complex swirl of historical events, Yokomitsu employs vivid, synaesthetic descriptions of the spectacle of the city, which he weaves into the story to amplify the personal lives and political beliefs of his characters. This technique exemplifies his literary modernism.

(Washburn 2001: 231)

SHANGHAI FOXTROT

Early twentieth-century Chinese literary modernism, associated chiefly with Shanghai, shares much with its Korean and Japanese counterparts, unsurprisingly given the era's vibrant intra-East Asian literary exchanges. Chinese writers were familiar with the works of their Western and East Asian colleagues, which they read in both original and translation, discussed in their criticism, and with which they engaged in their own work. Many of China's most prominent twentieth-century writers published at least some modernist work, including Dai Wangshu, Guo Moruo, Liu Huiyin, Ling Shuhua, Liu Na'ou, Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Mu Shiyong, Shi Zhecun, Tao Jingsun, and Yu Dafu.⁷ As elsewhere in Asia, Chinese literary modernism fell sharply with the Sino-Japanese War (1937) but continued in new forms in Shanghai (especially with Zhang Ailing), Chongqing (southwest China), Hong Kong, and other venues. Socialist realism dominated on the mainland after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, but in the years following the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) modernist and postmodernist production by Can Xue, Mo Yan, Yu Yua, and others exploded.

Mu Shiyong's 'Shanghai Foxtrot' (1932), published a year after Yokomitsu's *Shanghai* and one of China's most prominent modernist works, engages with and often contradicts its Japanese predecessor. Mu Shiyong, often called the 'Chinese Yokomitsu', did not meet Yokomitsu until the late 1930s, but he was long an ardent reader of his fiction. A fragmented short story incorporating many of the experiments with language, space, and time that characterized both Western and Asian modernist texts,⁸ 'Shanghai Foxtrot' features a writer who implicitly dismisses Yokomitsu's portrayal of Shanghai:

Off to the side a long-haired unshaven writer looking at this absurdity. He thinks of a title: Chapter 2 pilgrimage – inspect the city's dark side SONATA...(The writer thinks:) chapter 1 pilgrimage gambling den chapter 2 pilgrimage street corner prostitutes chapter 3 pilgrimage dance hall chapter 4 pilgrimage what's more *The Eastern Miscellany*, *Fiction Monthly*, *Literature and Art Monthly* first sentence write the prostitution trade on Dama Road Beijing Street.....won't do.

(Mu Shiyong 1995: 256–7)

The first sections of this character's imagined work correspond loosely with the opening segments of Yokomitsu's novel, where prostitutes accost Sanki (the protagonist), the narrator reveals Sanki's apprehensions concerning shady monetary dealings at his firm, and Kōya (a childhood friend of Sanki who has come to Shanghai looking for a wife) and Yamaguchi (a longtime friend of Kōya) meet in a dance hall. But the writer in 'Shanghai Foxtrot' dismisses Yokomitsu's narrative: '[this] won't do.' The struggle with foreign texts is more difficult than imagined. Following a woman home, the writer reaffirms his desire to create but appears overwhelmed with foreign texts:

China's tragedy here is certainly material for a novel the year 1931 is my time *The Eastern Novel*, *North Star* every month a volume Japanese translations Russian translations translations from every country all publish Nobel prize and great and get rich.

(Mu Shiyong 1995: 257)⁹

Appearing toward the conclusion, these passages cast ‘Shanghai Foxtrot’ in a new light. The short story that initially presents itself as a fragment providing slivers of Shanghai street and dance hall life circa 1930 reveals that it also competes with Japanese and other foreign texts, particularly those that offer a ‘foreign’ view of Shanghai.

Simultaneously, Mu Shiying presents the city as more technologically advanced than does Yokomitsu, who begins with fog and lacks the common early twentieth-century Chinese creative evocations of the city, featuring new styles and technologies and illuminated by flashing electric lights. In addition to the cars, electric trams, trains, and their accessories (horns, lights, rails, barriers), Mu Shiying’s story refers to high-speed elevators, endless rows of telephone poles, neon lights, buildings popping up right and left, and elegant hotels. Conversely, ‘Shanghai Foxtrot’ exposes the high price of these transformations, describing how new construction is nourished by the blood of workers killed on the job:

The corpse is removed. In the empty lot: ditches horizontal and vertical, steel bones, debris, still a pile of his blood. On the blood, spread cement, build up steel bones, a new restaurant rises up! A new dance hall rises up! A new hotel rises up! Take his strength, take his blood, take his life crushed beneath.

(Mu Shiying 1995: 255).

Bones and blood mix with construction materials forming the building’s foundations. In ‘Shanghai Foxtrot’ the flashing strobes of tall buildings seem all the more illuminating contrasted with the struggles for survival in the darkness below.

WINGS

In the 1930s, many Korean writers turned to modernism, including Ch’oe Chaesŏ, Ch’oe Myŏngsik, Chŏng Chiyong, Kim Kirim, Kim Yujŏng, Pak T’aewŏn, Yi Hyosŏk, Yi Sang, and Yi T’aejun. Some wrote in both Japanese and Korean. The psychological malaise of the modern city and its material culture characterized their work, as did formal experimentation and marginalized characters. Not simply ‘a discourse oppositional to realism’, which had flourished in the previous decade, Korean literary modernism engaged with contemporary concerns, including the problem of language as a ‘flawed medium of communication’ (Hanscom 2013: 10). Again, literary modernism subsided during the Second World War but resurfaced in the 1950s and after, particularly in the poetry of Hwang Tonggyu, Kim Kyŏngnin, Kim Suyŏng, and Kim Kyudong (Lee 2003: 427–39).

One of Korea’s predominant modernists, Yi Sang, engaged with Japanese predecessors such as Haruyama Yukio and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. His poems replicate distinctive punctuation, specialized vocabulary, and images from the Japanese texts, while also frequently capturing the alienation and the ambivalence of colonized Korean artists. Like Haruyama, Yi Sang uses *katakana* (the Japanese phonetic alphabet for loan words and official documents) to transcribe Japanese speech that ordinarily would be written in *hiragana* (the Japanese phonetic alphabet for most Japanese-derived speech). But whereas Haruyama writes out Western loan words and Japanese-derived parts of speech in *katakana*, Yi Sang reverses common

usage, employing *hiragana* for Western loan words and *katakana* for Japanese-derived speech. As William Gardner points out, “The “abnormal reversibility” of Yi Sang’s poetry is the uncanny mirror image of a Japanese modernism that is already embroiled in the twinned geopolitical situations of Western and Japanese imperialism” (Gardner 2006: 76–7).

Even more noteworthy is how Yi Sang intertextualizes Akutagawa, and in particular, ‘Aru ahō no isshō’ (‘A Fool’s Life’ 1927) and ‘Haguruma’ (‘Cogwheels’ 1927), in his Korean-language short story ‘Nalgae’ (‘Wings’). All three texts feature an emasculated and desperate writer with an unbearable home life who is obsessed by wings: his own imagined wings, the wings of animals, metal wings, and pictures of wings. Over the course of these stories, wings become remote from the human body and nearly impossible to utilize. They metamorphose within and among texts: from those of soaring butterflies that transform into easily destroyed ‘artificial wings’ and then into the limbs of preserved animals (‘A Fool’s Life’); to the metallic airfoils that support planes and the subject of frightening hallucinations, both of which struggle to supplant the less technologically advanced cogwheels (‘Cogwheels’); and finally to vanished and yearned-for body parts that have been replaced by Japanese architectural structures (‘Wings’).

These stories also portray words – mechanisms that allow for cerebral flight and facilitate intellectual escape – as coming increasingly from outside the individual and nearly impossible to harness. In ‘A Fool’s Life’, reading the works of earlier writers provides the protagonist with some comfort but gradually increases his anxiety; writing offers only slight reprieve and frequently exacerbates feelings of confinement. Although in ‘Cogwheels’ writing provides some solace, the words the narrator reads circulate in his mind as randomly and as menacingly as do wings, and they contribute to his eventual paralysis. By the conclusion of ‘Wings’, the dictionary is empty: the narrator imagines flipping through endless blank pages. The absence of words and wings in ‘Wings’ is particularly noticeable when compared with the proliferation of these elements in Akutagawa’s stories. Examining how depictions of wings and words are transformed both within and among Akutagawa’s and Yi Sang’s stories – primarily to emphasize the increasing despair of the antihero as he moves from a mechanized society to the colonial landscape – suggests the distress experienced by many educated early twentieth-century East Asians. These intellectuals feared that mechanical modernity, not to mention occupying colonial powers, far from providing greater opportunities, would ultimately leave them with nowhere to go and nothing to say. Lacking necessary expertise, they worried they would become obsolete. ‘A Fool’s Life’ depicts manufactured words (literary works) as increasingly threatening; images of words and wings on the attack intensify in ‘Cogwheels’. By ‘Wings’, artificial words and wings no longer are the primary concern. This story presents another side of modernity – an emasculated colonial intellectual stripped of his language and his wings by the very mechanized forces that created the menacing words and wings depicted in ‘Cogwheels’. Yet the narrator’s initial timidity is precisely what puts his eventual display of courage in bold relief.

Like the protagonists in Akutagawa’s stories (*kare*, from ‘A Fool’s Life’ and *boku* from ‘Cogwheels’), *na*, the first-person narrator of ‘Wings’, is a young isolated intellectual whose personal life is in disarray. Even more of a hermit than his Japanese predecessors, he spends most of his life in bed, hiding under the covers, while his wife

works outside the home during the day and at night serves male customers in her half of their room. But *na* has not lost all interest in the world, and after his wife physically and verbally abuses him, he considers leaving home for good. ‘Wings’ concludes with *na* standing on top of a Japanese department store in Seoul – an emblem of Japanese architectural, consumerist, and cultural penetration of Korea by the mid 1930s – calling on his ‘wings’ to regrow and allow him to fly again. ‘Wings’ exchanges *kare*’s and *boku*’s myopic pessimism for cautious faith. The individual who initially appeared to be the least likely of the three protagonists examined here to emerge out of the shadows is in fact the most determined to forge a new life. Yet ‘Wings’ also suggests that there is very little chance he will succeed, that he is too embattled by himself and by history to create meaningful change.

BURNING CHEEKS

Early twentieth century Taiwanese literary modernism, flourishing in the 1930s to 1940s, has been overshadowed by the 1960s resurgence of modernism as a struggle against more ideologically motivated work (Lupke 2003: 481). But writers such as Lin Yongxiu and Yang Chichang and their contemporaries shared many of the same concerns and experimented with similar forms as their Chinese, Korean, and Japanese counterparts. One excellent example is Yang Chichang’s Japanese-language modernist ‘Moeru hoo’ (‘Burning Cheeks’, 1935), which starts by incorporating lines from the Japanese poet Kitasono Katsue’s ‘Kazarimado’ (‘Show Window’), continues with the poet’s ‘Hodō’ (‘Paved Road’), and concludes with a line from his ‘Atsui monokuru 5’ (‘Hot Monocle 5’).

In ‘Burning Cheeks’, the poet evokes a scene similar to that in Kitasono’s ‘Show Window’ but replaces Kitasono’s image of clouds like tangerines moving above glassy skyscrapers with one of a flaxen sunset. Whereas the Japanese poem moves upward, from the poet’s body to the skyscraper and beyond, thereby overcoming the fallen leaves that he dismisses in his opening line, the Taiwanese poem begins beneath the setting sun, which although illuminating dancing leaves, restricts the poet’s terrain.

Restricted movement results quickly in increased anguish. The second stanza of ‘Burning Cheeks’ reworks Kitasono’s ‘Paved Road’, but whereas in the Japanese poem the pedestrian’s eyes are ‘shining’, in the Taiwanese poem they burn with great loneliness; Yang Chichang underlines the proximity of hate and regret (Yang 2002). The third stanza of Yang Chichang’s poem, as with Kitasono’s ‘Hot Monocle 5’, features a poet by the ocean described as ‘desolate, by oneself, pity’, but Yang Chichang’s narrator is more isolated from the world around him; unlike his Japanese counterpart, his memory is failing, and he hears the traces of sounds (the ‘ocean’ ringing in seashells) rather than the sounds themselves (Yang 2002). Combining two complete Japanese poems and a line from a third, ‘Burning Cheeks’ intensifies the expression of psychological anguish – including anger, hatred, and isolation – voiced by its Japanese predecessors. Yang Chichang’s textual foundations are readily apparent to those familiar with Kitasono’s work, the Taiwanese poet luring the reader into a familiar environment only to pull out the rug from underneath. But as in many reworkings of Japanese literature that highlight semi-colonial suffering, the source of his emotional trauma remains enshrouded.

East Asian literary modernism has been critiqued, if not dismissed, for being too slavish to Western forms and for imposing on itself ‘such spiritual disease as the alienation syndrome, existentialist despair, and nihilistic moral depravity’ (Chang 1993: 6). But in the last few decades scholars have begun to engage with this corpus more rigorously, analyzing its many nuances and permutations, and exposing it as a dynamically rich set of texts deeply intertwined with contemporary concerns and participating in cultural rejuvenation both within East Asia and, as translations continue to proliferate, increasingly worldwide.

NOTES

1. Japan colonized Taiwan in 1895 and Korea in 1910; it never formally colonized China, but subjected the mainland to cultural, economic, political, and military pressure from the end of the nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, including seizing Manchuria in 1931.
2. Shu-mei Shih’s remarks concerning Western modernist writers and China apply more generally: ‘[they tended to] absent China as a historical entity in their texts and turn it into an embodiment of cultural exotica’ (2001: 10).
3. In this chapter East Asian names are given in the customary East Asian order, with family name first.
4. See also Starrs.
5. Shanghai remains China’s most populous city and one of the world’s largest. The term ‘semicolonial’ designates the multinational yet fragmented political, economic, and cultural domination of China by Japan and numerous Western nations from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries.
6. Translations of *Shanghai* are from Washburn.
7. Liu Na’ou was born to a Taiwanese father and Japanese mother and raised in Japan, but generally is considered a Chinese writer because of his numerous literary and cinematic activities in Shanghai.
8. Edward Gunn discusses the stylistic innovations of ‘Shanghai Foxtrot’, as well as its recovery of archaic forms (1991: 125–6, 256–7).
9. Mu Shiyong refers to *Zhongguo yijiusanyi* (*China* 1931), a novel he hoped to write but never did. ‘Shanghai Foxtrot’ was to be a fragment of this text, hence its full title ‘Shanghai hubuwu (yige duanpian)’, or ‘Shanghai Foxtrot (a fragment)’.

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CHAPTER SIX

MUSICAL MODERNISM IN ASIA



Frederick Lau

This chapter takes as its assumption that uniform expressions and articulations of modernism do not exist in Asian music. Anyone familiar with scholarly work on modernism and modernity knows that there is no consensus on its meaning and manifestation. Furthermore, the question of what modernism means in Asia is difficult to answer since we are dealing with a vast region that is further subdivided into East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia, each with its own unique history, culture, politics, and social sentiments. Given this challenge, this overview is not meant to be comprehensive, chronological, or definitive. Instead, I will identify salient features of musical modernism drawn from countries across Asia without treating Asia as a monolithic geo-cultural entity.

At the outset, a working definition of modernism is in order. I take it to mean a set of ideas, values, and qualities closely tied to, inspired by, and as a reaction to eighteenth-century European Enlightenment ideals. Largely associated with an emphasis on human values, individualism, scientific method, progress, and logical reasoning, in the Asian context the notion of modernism is mostly founded on Western knowledge, value, and practices as guiding principles. In this chapter, I am interested in charting what Asian musicians *do* on the ground based on their understanding and interpretation of modernism.

Musical modernism in Asia exists in multiple modalities, formats, styles, and characteristics because it is informed by the country's socio-political-cultural context. Essentially, each culture indigenizes what it means to be modern to some extent and expresses it in its own terms over a long period of time. It is invariably intertwined with ideas of westernization, innovation, and progress. What we can safely say is that the arrival of modernism through Asians' contact with the West has spawned new ideas, challenged conventional ways of thinking about tradition, and inspired musicians to seek new expressions. This encounter inevitably led to a growth of grass-root or indigenous modernisms. Despite different degrees of intensity and engagement, the making of modernism in Asia has resulted in the creation of new musical trends, institutions, practices, concepts, and aesthetics in the region.

The emergence of musical modernism in Asia began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a result of increasing European military and missionary

presence. Against the backdrop of European military dominance, European music, concepts, and behaviour were seen specifically by Japanese, Chinese, and Korean musicians as scientific, organized, and thus superior to indigenous traditional music and practice (see for example Wade 2013; Everett & Lau 2004; Nettl 1985). The juxtaposition between traditional and European music set in motion the impetus for change as indigenous musicians began to evaluate their music, theory, and practice according to European standards.

From this perspective, modernity has long been equated with development – a catchword of capitalism and globalization – and has been as the very essence of modernization. Perceived as the most formidable achievement of the West, it is considered “a central concern for the so-called ‘Third World’” (Zhao 1997: 44). Some musical examples are the adoption of the 12-tone equal-tempered scale over the conventional pentatonic scale and just intonation, the adoption of Western instruments, and the creation of new music institutions. The battle for advocating modern music is thus fought on grounds of precision, technology, science, and progress. In the following, I focus on three signposts of musical modernism found throughout Asia: the development of music institutions and pedagogy, urban and national music, and new compositions.

MUSIC INSTITUTIONS AND MUSIC EDUCATION

Perhaps the most important mode of musical transmission in Asia was from master to disciple orally and through rote playing. This method was drastically different from the Western notion of musical training through standardized pedagogy and formalized methods offered at schools and conservatories. During the twentieth century, many Asian countries felt the need to remodel their music education system following Western institutions.

The most remarkable development in this area is found in East Asia. In the case of Japan, the Meiji government (1867–1912) considered European culture as superior and icons of modernism as part of its full-scale modernization project. In 1871, the Japanese government established a department of music at the imperial court to provide European-style music for foreign visitors. In an attempt to modernize its musical system, the ministry of education began to disseminate Western music through the help of the ‘Music Study Committee’ (*Onagaku torisirabe gakari*). Under its recommendation, the government established an institute of music for training performers in Western music theory, history, and instruments. This planted a firm foundation for developing Japanese modern music (see, for example, Wade 2013).

The situation is somewhat similar in China. Learning from their Japanese counterparts, Chinese musicians also embarked on a journey to develop new music education after many of them returned from studying in Japan and the West (Liu 2010). They concluded that if China was to be successful in modernizing itself, it needs a formalized music education. The first such institution was the National Music Academy of Music established in 1927 in Shanghai. Headed by the German-trained music scholar Xiao Youmei (1884–1940), this was the first modern conservatory established for Western and Chinese music. This music academy, originally named *Guoli Yinyue Xueyuan* (National Music Conservatory), was later renamed the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

In Korea, traditional Korean national music *kugak* and the earlier form of Korean indigenous music *hyangak* were tied to the royal court, shamanistic rituals, and agricultural festivals. Although some elite genres were created and documented during the *Choson* period (1392–1910), training of musicians was done by oral tradition and handed down from masters to students. In 1932, during the Japanese colonial period, several Japanese music scholars established the *Choson Minsokhahoe* (Korean Folklore Society). This was the first time texts of the narrative genre *pansori* were notated.

After the Second World War, a new music institution *Kungnip kugakwon* (National Traditional Music Center) was established in South Korea in 1950. This was the first government-sponsored modern music institution for the maintaining, performing, and researching of national music. Later its name was changed to National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts. The notion that traditional music needs to be protected—a modernist attitude towards traditional music—was formally instituted. A new system called the Intangible Cultural Properties system was put in place to honor certain traditional genres and master performers.

The situation in Southeast Asia developed differently because not too many government agencies were directly involved in the process of change. In Vietnam a new music conservatory system was set up based on the French model. Its main goal was to teach Western music, but it also included the teaching of traditional music with a new pedagogy that relied on music in Western stave notation. Uniformity and systematic performing style were emphasized to the extent that improvisation was rarely taught and was in fact discouraged (Miller & Williams 1998: 119).

In Thailand, the musical modernization project took a different path because the country was never under any colonial power. Even with the establishment of new universities and schools, the traditional master–student model was folded into the new system. A new Fine Arts Department (Krom Silaporn) was established in the 1930s for teaching and researching traditional music. Since the 1970s, the nation’s most prestigious university, Chulalongkorn, began to offer degrees in both Thai and Western music. In Indonesia, the post-colonial government established the Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia in Surakarta in the 1950s. Over the years, several high-school level institutions were founded in different locales such as Java, Bali, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. Over the same period, university-level institutions were also formed, devoted primarily to traditional performing arts and music. Now there are at least four *Institut Seni Indonesia* (Indonesian Arts Institutes) in Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Den Pasar (Bali), and Bandung (West Java).

MAKING OF URBAN AND NATIONAL MUSIC

The boundaries of folk music and elite music have been clearly demarcated in many traditional Asian contexts. Music performed in villages, festivals, temple fairs, and rituals generally falls under the rubric of folk music while music played for the upper class and at courts is known as elite or classical music. Music performed in the folk arena generally has lower social status than that performed for upper-class patrons. However, the changing spatial landscape, the creation of modern cities, and the formation of nation-states substantially altered this conventional folk–elite division and created conditions that called for new musics. The patronage of music has shifted

from courts and aristocracy to commercial outfits, record companies, dance halls, and concert venues.

As bedrocks of urban cultures, megacities and urban music further undermined the folk versus elite divide. Cities such as Shanghai, Tokyo, Seoul, Bangkok, Manila, and Jakarta became centers of politics and modern lifestyles with a vibrant mix of cultures. New music created by blending local and Western musical styles became the norm. In Shanghai, the emergence of *shidaiqu* (contemporary popular songs), a combination of local sensibilities and Western vernacular musical style, emerged in the 1930s. In Japan, the incorporation of violin by *enka-shi* (street singers) into their vocal genre formed the foundation of a post-war pop song style known as *enka*. The fusing of American pop song rhythm, Japanese *enka*, and Korean lyrics created the Korean pop genre *trot*. *Kroncong*, a local Indonesian pop genre that combined Western instruments, tonality and sonic elements from gamelan music, was developed throughout Indonesia since the nineteenth century. In most cases, the emergence of new urban environments generated a kind of new or modern music that altered the conventional folk–elite musical divide.

In the process of creating a modern nation-state, music was often used by government as a tool to promote modern culture and to secure the foundation of new society. In Japan, the Minister of Education was actively involved in promoting a genre of newly instituted songs in schools called *shoka* (school songs), a simple syllabic verse and chorus song form with simple harmonic progression and short and memorable melodies. The lyrics are meant to invoke modern nationalist emotions. Inspired by their Japanese counterparts, Chinese music educators such as Shen Xingong and Li Shutong also adopted this practice. Many adopted the Japanese *shoka* style and wrote Chinese school songs [*xuetong yuege*] for the newly modernized school education. School songs or *xuetong yuege* were treated as an important part of modern education. The trend of linking modern personhood to modern music has been widely popularized throughout Asia (Qian 2004).

COMPOSERS IN ASIA

The Western idea of ‘composer’, an individual artist who exerts total control on his work, is foreign to many Asian cultures. A key sign of modernism in Asian music, then, is the advent of the composer as an indispensable facet of any musical activity. The twentieth century witnessed a marked increase in the number of composers emerging from the region. Almost all of them had received training in Western music and were keenly aware of the importance of traditional music in composing modern music. Here, I will single out a few representative composers who are often cited as pioneers of modern Asian contemporary music.

Influential Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu brought Asian avant-garde music to new heights. Born in Tokyo, Tōru Takemitsu came into contact with Western classical music through radio broadcasts by the American occupying forces from 1945–52 and with outstanding Japanese modernist composers such as Toshi Ichianagi (b. 1933) and Fumio Hayasaka. From these colleagues, Takemitsu came into contact with the works of European avant-garde composers Olivier Messiaen, Luigi Nono, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. In 1951, Takemitsu co-founded the mixed

media group ‘Experimental Workshop’ with other composers to promote his own understanding of the avant-garde and musical modernism.

Takemitsu’s earliest works display influences of Second Viennese composers Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg, and French impressionism. His 1957 *Requiem* for strings incorporates serial techniques. In the early 1960s, he began to infuse traditional elements in his works. *Eclipse* for *biwa* and *shakuhachi* (1966) represents his initial attempt to engage traditional instruments and sound in a modernist language. His 1967 work *November Steps* for *biwa*, *shakuhachi* and orchestra written for the New York Philharmonic and premiered by Seiji Ozawa brought him most attention. This work was a defining moment in Takemitsu’s work in utilizing Japanese elements in a large-scale modern orchestral composition. Even though Takemitsu is remembered as a unique avant-garde Japanese composer, his efforts in creating a ‘modern’ music by incorporating traditional elements set the stage for other Asian composers.

Another towering voice in creating long-lasting effects on musical modernism in Asia came from the Korean composer Isang Yun. He studied music at the Osaka Conservatory in the 1930s and was exposed to the thinking of many modern Japanese composers. He taught for a short time at the Seoul National University in the 1950s but ended up holding a professorship at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin. Like Tōru Takemitsu, his work is deeply influenced by European avant-garde composers. Yun’s modernist musical language and aesthetics marked a great departure from works of other composers in Asia.

Yun was concerned with bridging the gap between Korean and Western music. Although his focus was on Western avant-garde music, his primary emphasis was on how to develop Korean music, a concern no doubt inspired by the modernist notions of development and progress. In many of his works, Yun’s music employs iconic sounds and techniques associated with traditional Korean music. The Korean instruments he references include the plucked zither *kayageum*, bowed fiddle *haegeum*, plectrum plucked zither *komungo*, bowed zither *ajaeng*, and side-blown flute *taegeum*. Their playing techniques utilized a considerable amount of glissandi, pizzicati, portamenti, vibrati, tonal flutters, and micro-tonal ornaments. Melodies of traditional Korean music are characterized by small melodic ornaments articulations, or grace notes played before or after the main pitch. Those unique melodic features and instrumental techniques became Yun’s main aesthetic core and the foundation of his modernist musical theory, ‘Haupttöne’, or main tone. His concept of a main tone is that it ‘needs a preparation and then a settling down with numerous ornamentations, vibratos, and glissando’ (Kim 2004: 185). The presence of many maintones in his compositions result in multiple melodic lines, constituting polyphony and polyrhythmic texture.

The incorporation of Korean music in Yun’s music is most obvious in the chamber orchestral composition *Loyang* (1962) in which the Korean hour-glass drum *changgo* was used. His 1961 *Colloides Sonores* for string orchestra references Korean instruments and sounds in unique ways. The three movements were named after three string instruments in Korean music, *hogung* (also known as the bowed fiddle *haegum*); *komungo* (plucked zither), and *yanggum* (hammered dulcimer). Yun attempts to reproduce the sounds of these instruments by imitating their articulations and melodic characteristics. Many of his compositions were inspired by Korean

instruments or music as indicated in the titles and musical organization. Among them are *Piri* for oboe solo (1971). *Piri* is the Korean name for the double-reed shawm used in ritual music, farmer's music, and court music. Yun's piece echoes the playing and timbre of the *piri*. Another noteworthy piece, *Reak* for larger orchestra (1966) again makes a strong connection to Korean music. The term *Reak* refers to Confucian ritual music, an important genre of music that continues to be performed in present-day Korea. Although the sound of his music is modernist in nature and outlook, it is clear that Yun has succeeded in finding a way to amalgamate Korean music with his own understanding of what it means to be modern. His method of infusing traditional instrument and musical elements in avant-garde compositions has inspired many contemporary Korean composers.

Yun's kind of musical modernism also found parallels in China, especially in the work of two composers from two different periods of the twentieth century: He Luting and Tan Dun. Their works are modernist in orientation, set against two very different temporal and cultural backdrops. He Luting is often considered as one of the pioneer composers who set the modern Chinese composition movement in motion. The second composer, Tan Dun, is among a handful of Chinese composers who endured the hardships of the Cultural Revolution and isolationism of Maoist China of the 1960s. Each sought to incorporate traditional musical elements that signaled China's coming of age in historical moments of the modern era.

He Luting lived and worked in the port city of Shanghai. Shanghai of the early twentieth century was a cosmopolitan city enlivened by a mixture of Chinese and European cultures with a vibrant urban twist. One could easily hear European classical music, piano music, jazz, film music, dance music, traditional Chinese music, local opera, and regional music. He Luting grew up in this musically rousing metropolis where modernism was the main driving force for its thriving urban culture (Lee 1999). But the bustling musical life belied a crisis concerning directions for China's modern music. He eventually went to study at the Shanghai Conservatory under the Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnin. Under Tcherepnin's encouragement He Luting began to turn to incorporating Chinese traditional elements in his music. His *Shepherd Boy's Flute* was awarded the first prize in a composition competition sponsored by Tcherepnin in 1934. Since then, all of his work has creatively fused Chinese music with tonal harmony and classical compositional procedure. Among his more popular compositions are the film songs *Si ji ge* (The Four Seasons Song) and *Tianya genu* (The Wandering Songstress) both composed for the 1937 film *Street Angel*, and made popular by the famous pop singer Zhou Xuan. He also wrote the music for the patriotic 'Guerrillas' Song.' His most remarkable contribution was his role as the head of the Shanghai Conservatory from 1949 to 1984, where the next generation of modern Chinese composers was trained.

Tan Dun is part of the new generation of composers after He Luting. During the political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, many young people were deprived of the chance of a formal education. Born in the late 1950s during the anti-rightist political movement, Tan did not receive any formal musical training but was sent to play in a village ensemble where he learned to play the bowed fiddle *erhu*. Not until after the end of the Cultural Revolution did Tan receive formal musical training. In the early 1980s, he trained in the Central Conservatory where he came into contact with modernist composers such as Tōru Takemitsu, Isang Yun, Chou Wen-Chung, George

Crumb, and Alexander Goehr. In 1986, he moved to New York and studied composition with Chou at Columbia University.

Tan has written work in many genres, such as opera, film music, symphonies, multi-media work, and instrumental works, all of which have a strong affiliation with Chinese music and culture. His cello concerto ‘The Map’ entitled ‘Sounds of Traditional China Amid a Multicultural Present’ is one such example in which he relies on traditional music of several Chinese regions and ethnic groups and taped sounds of ancient Chinese percussion, vocal lines, and reed instruments, as accompaniment to solo cello. Another opera featuring his form of musical modernism is his 1996 *Marco Polo* that depicts encounters between two characters, Marco and Polo (famous figures of music and literature). The opera’s two sections are made up of an imaginary story and accounts from Marco Polo’s travelogue. The music follows this structure and is divided into two parts. The imaginary encounters between the two characters are presented in music inspired by Peking Opera while Marco Polo’s travel is presented in Western operatic style. Non-Western instruments such as the south Asian *tabla* and *sitar*, Middle Eastern *rebec*, and Chinese *pipa*, *sheng* and Tibetan singing bowl and long horn are employed in the score. It is clear that Tan is seeking to establish his own form of modernism by incorporating instruments and sounds from a variety of cultures, thereby injecting a sense of cosmopolitanism in his music. His music concerns not only what it means to be a modern Chinese, but more importantly, how to be a global modernist.

CONCLUSION

Musical modernism is alive and well in Asia. As Asia has developed in multiple directions as a geo-political center in recent years, the meaning of modernism has also shifted. With intense processes of globalization or glocalization, Asian countries are creating modernisms that are inextricably linked to the trajectories of their social development. Since the 1980s, the idea of modernism is no longer tied to European or Western culture exclusively, as seen in the Asian crazes of Japanese pop music (J-Pop) in the 1980s and Korean pop music (K-Pop) in the new millennium. What began as experiments in fusing Chinese and Western music in compositions is now a major trend in the classical music world produced by a new generation of Chinese modernist composers. The idea of modernism is more process than essence. The legacy of musical modernism will continue to be refined and redefined according to the shifting cultural and political terrains in the region. Where it is heading will only be determined by how each country values and gauges its musical specificities and sensibilities against perceived global standards.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MODERN AND MODERNIST THEATRE AND DRAMA IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr.

Modernism in East and Southeast Asian drama is inevitably linked with colonialism and the imposition of Western culture upon indigenous culture, either from within or from without. For that matter, as Fredric Jameson and many others have argued, ‘Western modernity is inextricably tied to Western colonialism in Asia, Latin America and Africa’ (Friedman 2006: 426). So in one sense, all modernism stems from the interaction of cultures, East and West, rooted in observation of the Other – even in nations like China or Thailand, which were never fully colonized. Japan was never colonized, and was, in fact, an imperial power itself, but still responded to pressures both internal and external in the face of Western imperialism within Asia.

The other half of this equation is that modernity in Asian culture, and thus in Asian theatre, reflects a fundamental imposition of Western culture onto an already existent Asian culture: ‘In Southeast Asia, modernity was largely imposed by European administrators with little regard for indigenous systems [...]. Modernity in Southeast Asia was, and despite almost 200 years of assimilation sometimes still is, conceived of as “western”’ (Diamond 2012: 5). In other words, modernity in Asian drama (as in much of Asian culture) is both external and foreign, often even today.

In another sense, we must speak of ‘modernities’ in Asian drama and theatre. For the purposes of this essay, I follow Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, who argues ‘modernity is not one, but many’ and develops within ‘a specific culture’ (Gaonkar 2001: 17). Thus, Japanese modernity differs from Korean modernity, which differs from Indonesian and Vietnamese modernity, though they share many common attributes. I also follow Joshua Goldstein, who argues against the idea, so often presented in theatre histories, that modernity is a ‘linear, progressive development’ and thus ‘risks reproducing the teleological assumptions which lie at the heart of the ideological construction of a colonial modernity – that the modern involves dynamic change as opposed to the stasis of traditional’ theatre, and ‘that the western notion is universal, whereas its adjustments to non-western contexts are derivative alternatives’ (Goldstein 2007: 46). ‘Traditional theatre’ is not static, nor was it traditional in the Western sense. Until the advent of Western drama in Japan, kabuki was the

contemporary theatre of the masses. Even today, the Kabuki-za (the major kabuki theatre in Tokyo run by the Shochiku Corporation since 1914) still presents, in the midst of a ‘traditional’ repertoire, new works such as *Ô-Edo no Ribingu Dedu* (*The Living Dead of Tokyo*), a kabuki zombie play that debuted in 2011. Likewise, in China, *jingju* (Beijing opera) only fully developed in the nineteenth century, and was subject to changes and trends in society, including in the twentieth century, with the post-revolution introduction of the revolutionary model operas. While classical dramas from the nineteenth century and before are well known, *jingju* has a dramatic category of *xiandaixi* (contemporary plays), based on current events and recent subject matter.

What Susan Stanford Friedman observes of modernism in general can be seen in Asian modernities, especially that ‘the creative forces within those modernities’ of Asia in the form of writers, artists, actors, etc. ‘are engaged in producing modernisms that accompany their own particular modernities’ (Friedman 2006: 427). Modern and traditional dramas consciously respond to the challenges of colonialism and the presence of the modern West in Asia. ‘The rise of capitalism, urbanization, Western education and the loss of court patronage’, notes Andrew Killick, are all social changes brought about by modernity that had a profound impact on both the nature and purpose of traditional theatre and the development of modern theatre (2010: 48). Theatre, whether traditional, or modern, or hybrid, does not occur in a vacuum, and the shaping social effects of modernism have been displayed on the stages of Asia.

East Asia consists of the nations of Japan, China, and the two Koreas (although post-1950, North Korea has its own unique modernity). As the designation ‘Southeast Asia’ is, at heart, a geographic one, for my purposes I will divide Southeast Asia geographically into two areas: mainland Southeast Asia, consisting of the nations of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, and Maritime Southeast Asia, consisting of the nations of Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and East Timor. This essay will not seek to be comprehensive, but will rather use specific examples from different East Asian and Southeast Asian nations to demonstrate its contentions.

In particular, I will focus on three elements of modernity in East and Southeast Asian drama. First, I shall examine the changes to ‘traditional theatre’ in the face of modernities. Next, I will consider the development of ‘hybrid’ forms, particularly as a demonstration that we must consider the binary notion of tradition/modernity as a false dichotomy and instead look at their relationship as a continuum, one in which tradition shapes the modern and the modern shapes the traditional and the two blend to create hybrid forms. Third, and finally, I shall consider the invention of ‘spoken drama’ – the modern theatres of Asia.

What Aaron Gerow asserts of Japanese film, I assert of Japanese theatre, applicable to the rest of East and Southeast Asia at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth: that we view theatre ‘as a carrier of westernized discourse, invading Japan with foreign modes of seeing and experiencing that began to spread among the populace through the power of the medium itself’ (Gerow 2010: 21). These modes of seeing and experiencing transformed the perception of the ‘traditional theatre’ by audiences seeking novelty, modernity and social change. These modes of seeing also allowed for the development of a new, ‘modern’ theatre based on Western

models, and transformed the role theatre and drama played in society, as well as how they were produced. In response to modernity, we witness a conflicted societal reaction – the people of the nations being subjected to colonial modernity want the technology that contact with the West brings, but the cultural baggage and impositions are perceived by many as negative and fundamentally destructive to indigenous culture.

Gerow also emphasizes that while the inequalities of power between Asia and the West are ‘perhaps central to the formation of that modernism’, we must also affirm that ‘inequalities of power within Japan are just as important in the foundation of Japanese modernism’ (2010: 231). The modern theatre, the hybrid forms, and the attempted modernization of so-called traditional theatres are all the products of individuals outside the dominant power structure within indigenous theatre. The instigators of new drama were and always are on the outside of traditional theatre and often marginalized within society as well. Two points can be maintained from this fact. First, as Gerow stresses, internal factors and ideological struggles within Japan and the other nations of Asia led those excluded from the traditional theatres (or relegated to its margins) to seize upon modernism to create a cultural space for themselves. Second, modern theatre presented a means of transforming society to benefit the middle and lower classes, especially in nations in which the theatre had bifurcated into an aristocratic theatre for court and folk theatre for the masses (see, for example, Keene 1999). The new drama presented a means to transform society by creating a new theatre based on Western models for both the emerging middle class and for a newly socially conscious working class. This transformation also profoundly affected traditional theatre; kabuki, the drama of the working class of Edo era (1600–1868) Japan, for example, has become an expensive theatre for an educated, elite audience.

TRADITIONAL THEATRE

Modernism changed traditional theatre in a number of manners. First, by introducing the idea of the modern, modernist theatre already separates and categorizes itself as different from indigenous culture. The idea that kabuki, or *jingju*, or p’ansori would be anything but a contemporary theatre for the people can only occur when presented with alternative options. The consequence of the presence of modern drama is the apprehension of indigenous forms as ‘traditional’, and results in what Hobsbawm and Ranger term ‘the invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Although a frequent critique of their theories is that all traditions are invented and socially constructed, modernity in Asia requires us to consider in the modern era what is ‘formulated, institutionalized, and propagated as tradition’, as there are always underlying ideological causes (Vlastos 1998: 5). ‘Traditional’ theatre is only traditional in the face of modernity and continues to change in response to it.

As Brian Powell reminds us, attending the kabuki in 1869, the year after the Meiji Restoration, ‘was not at all different from going to the theatre in 1867,’ but 1889 ‘was significantly different’, and the kabuki of 1912, at the end of the Meiji era, would be ‘unrecognizable’ to those 1869 patrons (Powell 2002: 3). Western notions of national culture and national identity eventually result in the desire to

preserve ‘traditional’ forms in their current state. As Tom Hare cannily observes in his study on the integrity of tradition in *nō*, ‘all too often, the tradition in question is not really that old, not plausibly “authentic,” and maybe not that edifying’ (Hare 2008: 437). Eventually, the result is the promotion of ‘Living National Treasures’ in Japan, with similar titles elsewhere, practising ‘Intangible Cultural Assets’ with a government stipend. Such models of establishing and celebrating ‘traditional’ theatrical forms (among others) promulgate the notion that culture is unchanging, invariant, and essentialist. Kabuki and *nō* under modernity thus become means by which the notion of a Japanese national culture and identity can be established and maintained, to the point where kabuki can be a synecdoche for Japan to the West. We will see similar models in Southeast Asian theatre, in which Thai temple dance drama or Cambodian court drama are visual and performative synecdoches for their respective cultures.

Traditional theatre also changes in the face of Western stage technology. Whereas the revolve on a kabuki stage until the Meiji era was powered by a group of sumo wrestlers turning a wheel, the introduction of Western mechanics changed how theatre was made. The advent of different methods of lighting (such as the introduction of a state-of-the-art electric light system in the newly built Tsukiji Shogekijō) and scenic and costume technologies, combined with the introduction of Western rehearsal and production practices (everything from rehearsing plays entirely for a period of several days, to ticketing, to intermissions), transformed the traditional theatre in a modern manner.

The use of theatre for social change is a hallmark of modernity in the theatre as well. The Theatre Reform Movement (*Engeki Kairyō Undō*), for example, began in the 1880s with the founding of the Society for Theatre Reform (*Engeki Kairyōkai*), which sought to transform the kabuki by eliminating vice and promoting virtue on stage (removing prostitutes, thieves, and courtesans as protagonists, for example), promoting new dramas demonstrating modern values, and building modern theatre buildings for the performance of traditional plays.

The end result in Japan (as in other Asian nations) was the crystallization of kabuki and *nō* – the preservation of them in the form in which they were at the time of the Meiji Restoration. The kabuki seen on stage in Japan presents itself as the kabuki of the mid nineteenth century, unchanged since then. The transformation of indigenous theatre by modernity is complete when court dramas formerly performed for monarchs and aristocrats become entertainment for tourists in Japan, Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, and others.

J. Thomas Rimer argues that the modern theatre in Japan developed out of the crisis of the confrontation with Western drama. Encountering Shakespeare (whose work, it should be noted, entered Japan the same time as Ibsen and Chekhov, thus making him a modernist in the same mould as they) and Ibsen, the Japanese had a choice between modernization versus westernization (Rimer 1974: 7–55). ‘Modernization’ implies transforming the indigenous theatre into a modern version of itself, which frequently resulted in the hybrids discussed in the next section. ‘Westernization’, however, indicated the development of a completely new theatre, which will be examined in the section below that. This pattern repeats itself throughout East and Southeast Asia: modernize the indigenous theatre or build a new theatre based on Western models.

HYBRID THEATRE

In East and Southeast Asia there developed what Andrew Killick refers to as ‘hybrid-popular’ theatre, in which the elements of traditional drama were combined with the convention and dramaturgical models of the Western stage (Killick 2010: 48). Following Siyuan Liu (2013), I note three forms of modern hybridity in Asian drama: literary hybrids, translative hybrids, and performance hybrids, each designating where and by whom the blending occurs. Literary hybridity involves playwrights blending dramaturgical conventions from two different cultures. Translative hybrids, related to the first, are the result of translators moving a dramatic text from one culture to another by transforming the references and conventions to those of the target culture. For example, Kawakami Otojirō developed and directed an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello* in Tokyo in 1903. This new version was not merely a literary translation but a cultural translation as well, given that Venice and Cyprus (and their attendant cultural, ethnic, and social markers), as well as Moors, Christianity, and Islam would not be known to Japanese audiences. Tozawa Koya created a literary translation into Japanese for Kawakami, who then had popular writer Emi Suiin adapt the play to a Japanese cultural setting. Emi set the play in Taiwan (an island nation far enough away to be exotic but close enough to be familiar) and made the main character a dark-skinned Japanese general overseeing the Chinese of Taiwan. Although the play kept the title *Osero* (a transliteration of the English title), the protagonist’s name was Muro Washirō. Thus, Kawakami presented a Japanese *Othello* without Othello (see Anderson 2011: 516–17).

Performance hybrids offer a blend of two performance traditions. The Japanese *shinpa* (meaning ‘new drama’) is a hybrid form (also pioneered by Kawakami), which was initially performed in kabuki theatres with *onna-gata* (male actors specializing in female roles), but also employed texts modelled after European originals and some acting techniques from naturalism, thus blending kabuki and Western performance conventions. Likewise, the Chinese *wenmingxi* (‘civilized drama’) is a hybrid of indigenous performance forms (called ‘opera’ in the West) and Western dramaturgy (see Liu 2013).

Even kabuki had a hybrid form called *shin-kabuki* (‘new kabuki’), pioneered by playwright Kawatake Mokuami, who wrote *katsureki mono* (‘living history plays’) – kabuki dramas based on current events – for Ichikawa Danjūrō IX, and *zangirimono* (‘cropped hair plays’) – kabuki dramas set in contemporary offices and homes, named after the practice of cutting off the samurai topknot to appear more modern – for Onoe Kikugorō V. While neither of these forms became a popular success, they demonstrate the urge within kabuki to speak to contemporary audiences by changing the subject matter and presentation style of a supposedly unchanging ‘traditional theatre’.

Hybridity is also responsible for a means of understanding the drama of the Other: when Western plays were first performed by Europeans in Japan in the late nineteenth century, they were often described as ‘*seiyō kabuki*’ – Western kabuki, just as *jingju*, the late nineteenth-century Chinese form, is interpreted as ‘Beijing opera’, a term familiar to Westerners. Modernism allowed understanding the Other in terms of the Self, especially when it came to hybrids. The development of modern theatre, however, required an entirely new vocabulary.

MODERN THEATRE

Modern drama enters Asia roughly the same time that it develops in the West, as the naturalism movement within theatre was simultaneously occurring in Europe as Europe was colonizing Asia. As Christopher Innes observes, the naturalistic theatre movement of the nineteenth century combined ‘moral experiment and scientific analysis’ in order to provide ‘a coherent form of stage production’ that would transform both theatre and society (Innes 2000: 46). A new theatre would create a new society, and naturalism was the mode that found dominance in the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Émile Zola, André Antione, Henrik Ibsen, and Anton Chekhov, among others, brought about a revolution in stage representation, shaped by the intellectual, social, artistic, and scientific revolutions of the nineteenth century. Their theatre rapidly spread around the globe, including Asia.

Modern theatre begins in most Asian nations with Europeans performing European plays by and for other Europeans, but also attended by a small number of educated, indigenous elite, usually the beneficiaries of Western education and connections to Europe and the West. Other Asian students and artists travelled to Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States, in order to be educated and to experience Western theatre directly. The result is what Catherine Diamond terms ‘local realisms’ (2012: 8). This modern theatrical form varies from culture to culture, and, just as a kabuki patron of 1900 would not recognize 1868 kabuki, and vice versa, so too would a patron of shingeki in 1906 not recognize shingeki performance in 1950 as ‘realistic’, just as the reverse is also true. But all modern theatre in East Asia and Southeast Asia is rooted in the introduction of Western-style realism.

Modern theatre from the West provided a radically different conceptualization of performance that can be understood through the language to describe it. In China, modern drama was called *Huaju* (‘spoken drama’); in Vietnam, the modern theatre is *kịch nói* (‘spoken plays’); in Laos, the modern theatre is *lakhon vao* (‘spoken drama’); in Thailand it is *Lakon phut* (‘spoken drama’); and the term ‘spoken drama’ is used in many cultures in Asia to differentiate the modern theatre from traditional plays in which dialogue was mostly sung or chanted. In other words, modern theatre in Asia is spoken theatre. Kawakami Otojiro called his *shinpa* plays ‘*seigeki*’: ‘true theatre’, to distinguish it from the spectacular non-naturalism that was kabuki. The very names given to the new theatres were designed to distinguish them from the indigenous, already established dramas.

Similarly, the other term employed for Western-influenced theatre is ‘new theatre’. *Shinpa*, the first Japanese hybrid modern theatre literally means ‘new school’, to distinguish it from kabuki, which was perceived as ‘old school’. *Shingeki*, the next form to emerge and the one that remains the dominant modern theatre in Japan, means ‘new theatre’. In Korea, whose modern theatre developed under Japanese colonialism, the theatres are *shinpa-gŭk* and *shingŭk*, ‘new school theatre’ and ‘new theatre’, respectively. The modern spoken drama of Burma, now called Myanmar, is *pya zat*, literally ‘new plays’. This inclination to distinguish between new and old theatre was also true in China in the first two decades of spoken theatre, where it was called *xinju* (new drama) – as opposed to *jiuju* (old drama). The term *huaju* (spoken drama) was adopted in the 1920s to emphasize the spoken dialogue.

Other names also indicate the purpose of the new theatre: Hang Tun Hak, a Cambodian student in France in the 1950s, returned to begin writing what he called ‘national drama’ (*lakhon chiet*) to promote a sense of modern national identity in Cambodian French Indochina. In China, another name for *xinju* was *wenmingxi* (civilized drama), to distinguish it from what the European-educated elite who preferred the modern saw as a bawdy, raucous, low traditional drama.

All in all, the individual names for the new theatres focus on three aspects: to distinguish them from the indigenous theatres, especially with a focus on its spoken aspect or its relative newness; to create a national identity; to promote the idea of the modern, of the new, without specifically naming the West as the source of these ideas. Four further aspects unite modern Asian theatres and dramas: they are theatres of amateurs and academics; of educated elites; of social change; and are used to critique the very modernity that created them.

In the West, as Christopher Innes avers, modernist theatre artists either ‘trained actors in their own theatre companies, like Artaud and Brecht, or used untrained amateurs, like Gordon Craig’ (Innes 1999: 129). Modern theatre in Asia is also a theatre of amateurs and academics. The ‘traditional theatre’ was the professional theatre in the East and Southeast Asian nations, with wealthy, aristocratic, or royal patrons. Modern theatre was thus developed by untrained (or trained in Western-style drama) amateurs and university professors, mostly trained in literature. For example, the first individual to translate the complete works of Shakespeare into Japanese was Tsubouchi Shōyō, a professor of English at Waseda University, and the founder of the Bungei Kyokai (Literary Arts Society, 1906), an amateur theatre group which presented Ibsen, Chekhov, Shakespeare, and Maeterlinck to audiences in Tokyo. The Oxford-educated Prince Vajiravudh, the ‘Father of Modern Thai Theatre’, built the first modern theatre in Thailand, translated three of Shakespeare’s plays into Thai, and saw in the theatre a means by which Thai culture and society might be modernized.

Modern theatre is a theatre of the educated elite. Whereas Saigon (in Vietnam) developed *cai luong*, a hybrid popular form appealing to the masses, the spoken drama of colonial Vietnam, *kịch nói*, developed and flourished in Hanoi by and for French-educated intellectuals. Modern Western-style drama in Vietnam first appeared under French colonial rule in 1915, when French-educated Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh translated Molière into Vietnamese.

Modern theatre was a theatre of social change, often promoting women’s rights and changes to the indigenous ruling structure or class system. And, just as it was developed by encounters with the West, the modern theatre rapidly transformed into a means to critique the very modernity that gave it existence: ‘The theatre reflected both the superficial imitation of European fashion and manners as well as conflicts in values, and it whetted its satirical edge by exposing the hypocrisy that resulted from its discrepancies’ (Diamond 2012: 6).

CONCLUSION

Modernity has faded in the twenty-first century in most Asian nations, primarily with the aging of the generations that embraced it. As Diamond observes, what was once avant-garde and socially and artistically progressive is now nostalgia for the elderly

(Diamond 2012: 2). The remains of modernity in East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures lie buried beneath globalism, technology, and postmodernism, not to mention the cultural self-awareness of nations that embraced modernity, but resisted the colonialism, of colonial modernity.

Ironically, the West also looked East in order to develop its own modern theatre. Yeats, Brecht, Artaud, Craig, Pound, and many other theatre artists saw in Japan, China, and Southeast Asian performance a model to bring life to what they perceived as a tired, spiritually dead theatre. As Innes contends, ‘borrowing from oriental models in fact becomes a standard characteristic for the dramatic side of the [modernist] movement’ (Innes 1999: 132–33). On both sides of the colonial coin, artists looked in the opposite direction and saw a model by which a modern theatre might be created and through it a modern society transformed.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEN WAS EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MODERNISM IN ART? Comparisons and intersections



Simon Soon

Writing about a generation of migrant Chinese painters who had made the British colony of Singapore their new home after the Second World War, art historian Michael Sullivan noted,

these painters are searching for the means to express, in their own way, what they feel about the land and people of Malaya. Their work may sometimes be groping and tentative, but their inspiration lies in Malaya itself, and not in Paris or Peking.

(Sullivan 1956)

Connecting this generation of artists to Chinese painting, Sullivan primarily drew from the modernist idiom loosely termed the ‘School of Paris’ by way of its transfer to China to assert that the critical marker for *nanyang* (South Sea) art operated on three registers: European modernism, Chinese ink aesthetic, and tropical subjects.¹

With the Nanyang Artists Retrospective Exhibition in 1979 at the National Art Gallery of Kuala Lumpur, it was possible to view *nanyang* as geographically, aesthetically, and politically distinct. Informed by the gradual participation of the ethnic Chinese community in forming Malaysia and Singapore,² this later reading positioned *nanyang* as a pioneering moment in these national art histories, underlining its connection to the Malayan nationalist imaginary emerging in the 1950s (Low 2010).

These different iterations and framings demonstrate a discursive shift away from the cultural productions of the Chinese diaspora within the history of Chinese modern art, and towards the *nanyang* as an imaginative geography and artistic practice as it overlaps with nationalism and regionalism distinct from Chinese art history. They also demonstrate the link between East and Southeast Asia's modernisms in the immediate post-war period, instantiating the bridge between two geographies but also highlighting the different regional units that determined *nanyang*'s discursive framework.

In comparing East and Southeast Asian modernisms, I aim to avoid thinking about the two regional units as geographically fixed – even as I follow the generally accepted

definition of East and Southeast Asia today. I also seek to avoid thinking solely about the formulation of these concepts of regionality as external constructs, imposed by European imperialist desires to map the ‘Far East’ according to a Eurocentric sense of geographic centre, or of Southeast Asia as a proxy theatre of the Cold War.

Instead, comparative modernities is suggested as a method to uncover the historical affinities that might help us think of regionality as a set of contingencies:

Regionality need not be seen simply as a desire for an imagined fraternity. Enmeshing practices, histories and ideals into a crucible of dialogue dismantles the frames and assumptions, unpacking national categories, and allowing for cycles of formation and deconstruction. Efforts in regionality can be seen as acts that simultaneously shape and reshape configurations of culture and geography, rendering categories dynamic and unstable.

(Mashadi 2004: 25–6)

This approach allows us to use historical practices to fracture the established narratives of modernism, to produce a discursive framework that resonates with the history of decolonization, and to seek affinities beyond the confines of national history (Clark 2010: 23–4). The larger purpose is to uncover common ground whereby the invention of a ‘critical vocabulary’ or a ‘calibrated terminology’ could engender an art history capable of making sense of these intersecting histories (Pastor-Roces 1993: 47, 48).

MODERNITY AS CONTEXT

Modernism in the present context refers to how artists responded to modernity in Asia. Central to the encounter with new modes of visibility, technologies of representation, and new materials of art is a process that has been described as ‘relativisation’ (Clark 1998: 23). In East Asia, an endogenous academic painting discourse was relativized at the point of contact with Western modes of representation. In this process, two interlinked but separate domains of practice from Euro-American discourse emerged. Modernism thus functions as ‘a reflexive understanding of modernity, where the past is not simply relativised by current practice, but relativisation itself becomes the part of the subject of art practice’ (Clark 2012: 51).

These domains are defined as a Western discourse and an indigenous discourse, respectively known as *yoga* and *nihonga* in Japan, *guohua* and *xiyanghua* in China, *xiyanghua* and *tongyanghua* in Taiwan, *sōyanghwa* and *tongyanghwa* in Korea. The bifurcation of two domains and cultures of painting in Japan in the 1890s spread to other parts of East Asia such as Korea in the 1910s and Taiwan in the 1920s, resulting from Japanese colonization.³ Increased intellectual exchange between Japan and China from the mid 1920s onwards also resulted in the widespread adoption of this articulation.

As such, even as materials, media, processes, and techniques distinguished indigenous painting, ‘Western-style painting’ acquired its own localized practices as well, although cross-influences between the two remain fertile. Kuroda Seiki, known primarily as a proponent of an *en plein air*/impressionist approach to *yoga*, was also

celebrated for his monumental triptych *Chi Kan Jo* (*Wisdom, Impression, Sentiment*, 1900). This work's monochromatic gold background refers to traditional Japanese folding screens in its painterly treatment of space, even as his depiction of a female nude draws from the plasticity and volume of academic realism.

While the demarcation between the endogenous and exogenous discourses in East Asia is most distinctly articulated in the two painting cultures, Euro-American processes of 'othering' are less discrete in Southeast Asia. Here, we find a more marked collapse of categorical distinctions between endogenous aesthetics and knowledge systems with exogenous modes of visibility (Clark 1993a). This contrasts the *yōga* vs. *nihonga* division, where the production of sustained genres and institutions results in two separate forms that converse with each other yet remain separate. As such, the relativization of Euro-American painterly discourse in Southeast Asia was pitted against a craft tradition of painting.

Even in Vietnam – with a heavily Sinicized court and literati culture – the terms of contact did not clearly demarcate between local and Western styles of painting. While painterly technology and representation vary across the region, the interaction with European academic and modern art discourses can be seen in Thai temple murals, Balinese cloth painting, Burmese *parabaik* manuscript, Vietnamese decorative lacquer painting and religious silk scrolls paintings, and Filipino Catholic religious statuary. The main difference from East Asia was that these painting practices existed primarily on the level of the craft guild and did not develop a distinct academic discourse, which could then be relativized upon contact with Euro-American academic art discourse. If the neo-traditional emerged, as it did in Balinese, Thai, Vietnamese, and Islamic-Malay examples, the impetus was often centred on specific colonial or post-colonial production of a serviceable discourse that is more syncretic than discrete.

These two modalities of contact – an East Asian cultural domain with an indigenous academic painting discourse, and a Southeast Asian cultural domain without an indigenous academic painting discourse – shaped the trajectories of modernism across East Asia and Southeast Asia.

ASIAN MODERNISMS

Space does not permit me to dwell extensively on how modernism developed in each of the East and Southeast Asian countries. Instead, this overview offers key moments to arrive at some comparative knowledge. The phenomenon of modernism arrived through the speed with which new cultural and aesthetic discourses were able to travel from the European metropole, and with which they replaced established values for a younger generation of artists. Modernism's absorption was an attempt to negotiate a new articulation of modernity, often by a succeeding generation of artists, who felt that preceding modes of visibility were not only dated but also represented canonized values.

One example is the privileging of personal vision through an exploration of new pictorial expression aimed at capturing emotional exigencies. Takamura Kotaro's seminal essay '*Midori iro no taiyō*' ('Green Sun'), published in the literary magazine *Subaru* in April 1910, provides an early example. Takamura rejected the need to capture or express any inherent quality associated with Japan: 'Even if someone paints a "green sun", I will not say it is wrong. This is because there may be a time



Figure 8.1 Tetsugoro Yorozu, *Nude Beauty*, 1912, oil on canvas, 162 x 97 cm,
Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.
Photo: MOMAT/DNPartcom.

when the sun looks that way to me too [...] I'd like to allow the *Persönlichkeit* [Personality] of the artist who has painted a green sun to have absolute authority' (Takamura 2011 [1910]: 22).

This approach was also allied, and at times overlapped, with the exploration of pictorial language as a significant part of painterly practice, e.g. in the works of Ryusei Kishida or cubist/fauvist Tetsugoro Yoruzo. Both of these artists became interested in *nanga* (Southern painting) – Chinese literati painting – also known as the Southern school of Chinese ink painting. *Nanga* allowed for free brush play as a means to exceed realism (for Kishida) and to find new expressive grounds (for Yoruzo) (Clark 2012: 171–2). Arguably, this move away from *yoga* simply reflects *yoga*'s gradual absorption into a systemic embodiment of Japanese national imaginary (Winther-Tamaki 2012: 17–18).

Modernism's preference for innovation was facilitated by new media and modes of distribution. For example, modern Japanese translates 'fine arts' as *bijutsu* and a broader concept of 'the arts' as *geijutsu*. These terms share the same character in Chinese modern art vocabulary: *meishu* and *yishu*. Though the Chinese character

was often used interchangeably, by the 1920s it came to refer to distinguishable qualities: *meishu* referring to practice, and *yishu* to a metaphysical concept. Luxun advocated the broader notion of creativity indicated by *yishu* when he brought together 13 Shanghai art students under the apprenticeship of Japanese print-maker Uchiyama Kayoshi. Uchiyama was influenced by the *sōsaku-hanga* (creative prints) renewal in Japanese print-making in the early part of the twentieth century that had emphasized the singularity of artist as print producer across the entire print-making process, as opposed to the collaborative model that had structured *ukiyo-e* productions in the past (Tang 2008: 108). This in turn influenced the formation of a modernist woodcut movement in 1930s China, wherein a politicization of form and content sought a visual complement to the cultural energies of the New Culture Movement.⁴

Another example of how art intersected with shifting social realities manifests in the opportunities afforded to a female artist like Pan Yuliang from Yangzhou. After her parents died, she was sold to a brothel because of her family's poverty. However, she was able to attract the attention of a wealthy customs official and became his second wife. Together, they moved to Shanghai where she enrolled in the Shanghai Art Academy in 1918 and went on to study in Lyons and Rome. Upon her return to China in 1929, she taught at the Shanghai Art Academy and later the National Central University. Pan held a total of five solo exhibitions from 1929–37, where she became known as the first female Chinese artist to paint in the modernist vernacular. However, government officials and critics often condemned her paintings, which featured nudity – not to mention connecting this to her insalubrious past (Shen 1998: 178). Artistic modernism thus occasionally marked new opportunities for female artists and drove change to some individuals' social circumstances.

Modernism's development in Southeast Asia was more circuitous, following distinct trajectories. The earliest was perhaps the staging of a one-man show in 1928 at the Philippine Columbia Club by Victorio Edades. Though his earlier works show affinity with post-impressionism, his training in architecture in Seattle and his exposure to Mexican muralists influenced his later collaborative projects, including a mural-scale collaborative painting with Galo Ocampo and Carlos Francisco Botong entitled *Interacion*. The three also worked together on a now-destroyed mural at the Capitol Theatre designed by architect Juan Nakpil. Nakpil in turn worked with Edades to organize the School of Design at University Santo Tomas, the oldest tertiary-level institution following the Western pedagogical model in Asia.

Following this was an Indonesian modernism that appealed to the concept of *jiwa ketok* (visible soul). This was an artistic response to the polemical debate in the pages of the literary periodical *Pudjangga Baru* (*New Poets*), and was emboldened by the Youth Pledge of 1928 to articulate Indonesian nationhood along three registers: one motherland, one nation, and one language. Unlike the travels undertaken by Japanese artists to Europe, a large part of this shift in Indonesia was enabled by the collection of modern paintings by Dutch industrialist Alexandre Regnault, which was exhibited at the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* (Batavia Art Circle) alongside works on loan from other collectors from 1934–9.⁵ The exhibitions encouraged new formal experimentation amongst a group of Indonesian painters, who would go on to establish Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia (PERSAGI) (Indonesian Picture Makers Association) in 1938. Though dissolved with the Japanese occupation of Java during the Second World War, many PERSAGI artists continued to receive support from



Figure 8.2 Victorio C. Edades, Carlos V. Francisco and Galo B. Ocampo, *Mother Nature's Bounty Harvest*, 1935, oil on canvas, 256.5 x 270.5 cm, Dr Eleuterio Pascual Collection, Manila, Philippines.

Japanese-sponsored cultural organizations during the occupation (Spanjaard 2003: 73–7). Japan's defeat was followed by the revolutionary Independence struggle against Dutch forces bent on reoccupying their colonial territories. Sindoesoedarsono Sudjojono, responding to Dutch critic J. Hopman's comment that an Indonesian art had yet to emerge, argued the following:

We, as Indonesians, admit that our painterly style is Western style. But to say that this is not Indonesian painting is inaccurate. Firstly, because we, even before Raden Saleh, already have our own painterly tradition [...] Secondly, even as we have departed from our historical painterly tradition, this is not a phase where we only follow and copy, but it is a *belevia* with the truth that is contained in the theories of da Vinci, Dürer, Cezanne, and others.

(Sudjojono 1948: 3)

In Thailand, the definition of 'modern' within a national context was moderated by Italian émigré Corrado Feroci, who first came to Siam as court sculptor and later

founded the Silapakorn University. He became a Thai citizen and changed his name to Silpa Bhirasri, later observing, ‘no surrealism or abstractism [*sic*] is to be seen in Thailand. These kinds of art, if not treated “childishly”, as in fact they are in too many cases, require an intellectual maturity, which our artists have not yet reached’ (Bhirasri 1961: 81).

These examples underscore the multifarious trajectory of modernism across East and Southeast Asia. Central to this trend were aesthetic debates. The battle lines were often drawn across art academies. A stark division in China arose with the appointment of French-trained modernist Ling Fengmian as director of the Hangzhou National Art Academy. Ling’s modernism clashed with the academic realism of Xu Beihong who headed the art department at the National Central University in the former capital Nanjing during the Republican era. The clash took place in a seminal 1929 debate between Xu Beihong and modernist poet Xu Zhimo over including post-impressionist works at the first National Art Exhibition in 1929 (Wang 2012: 171–2).

This ideological conflict also played out in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, the modernists derogatorily labelled their predecessors as the *Mooi Indies* (Beautiful Indies) genre of landscape, and criticized their inability to capture the reality of a society undergoing tremendous change. Similarly, Edades railed against the ‘conservative style’ in the Philippines, where the pictorial conventions of Fernando Amorsolo confined his subjects to the idyll of the Filipino pastoral. In contrast, Edades’ *The Builders* (1928) depicts the hulking bodies and contorted forms of the labouring class, evoking an atmosphere of hardship and tedium that repositions toil as central to the plebeian experience of modern life. These tensions culminated in 1955 in a coordinated boycott of the Art Association of the Philippines’s competition and exhibit by a conservative faction of artists (Kalaw-Ledesma and Guerrero 1974: 16–17). The conservatives’ walkout marked the ascendancy of modernism in the Philippines.

Just three decades before, the Japanese constructivist/futurist collective MAVO had staged an outdoor exhibition at Tokyo’s Ueno Park to protest against the conservative turn of the 10th Nika Exhibition in August 1923 (Weisenfeld 2002: 77).⁶ Yet, by the 1950s, modernism’s position had been secured, and these visions play a central role in embodying the turbulent history of postwar recovery, decolonization, and nation-building.

CONVERSING HISTORIES

By asking, ‘when was modernism?’, Raymond Williams queried the motivations driving our understanding of modernism as a cultural and historical paradigm. As he elaborated, ‘determining the process which fixed the moment of modernism is a matter [...] of identifying the machinery of selective tradition’ (Williams 1989: 49). Subsequent scholarship has problematized claims to universalism that not only privilege traditional sources of influence, but also locate the dominant discourse within Euro-America.

Our arrival at this expanded outlook on modernism and modernity through the study of its cultural transfer to other parts of the world has been augured by the transition towards the paradigm of contemporaneity. Terry Smith defines

contemporaneity as a ‘multiplicity of ways of being in time’ (Smith 2011: 4). This paradigm acknowledges the effect of the simultaneity of multiple temporalities as a condition of being contemporaneous; it also enables the prospecting of modern art history outside of the familiar teleological narrative, expanding its terms to consider both speed and geography as central to modernism’s spread. Yet, to think of ‘Asian modernities’ as a disciplinary field is not to essentialize Asia as incommensurate with the dominant story of modern art primarily focused on developments within Europe and the United States. This latter approach, according to Keith Moxey, all too often reaffirmed Asia’s provincialism even as it sought to provincialize the dominant discourse. Drawing primarily on South African modern art as a case study, he notes that the gulf needs to be crossed (Moxey 2013: 20).

Placing histories in conversation with each other can complicate standard narratives and uncover the motivations behind the writing of art history. Such undertakings suggest that art historical knowledge can break free of its institutionalization. Such a reading could even repurpose art historical writing as a practice centred on ‘sympathies and ethical commitment’ (Flores 2013).

In this light, ‘Asian modernities’ have the ability to move beyond the grand narratives of modernism and modernity. Writing such history does not always come from Euro-American institutions: witness *Nihon kindai yoga-shi* (*The History of Modern Western Painting in Japan*, 1941) by Hijika Teichi, later director of the first modern art museum in Japan, the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art in 1951 (Mitsuda 2012: 49).

Critical reassessment of modern art history in Southeast Asia has been traced to the curatorial and historiographical gestures of figures such as Jim Supangkat and Apinan Poshyananda. Supangkat had by the 1990s advocated for reading multi-modernism to articulate a genealogy of Indonesian art whose context and roots were distinct from Euro-American modernism (Supangkat 1997: 228). In Southeast Asia, these negotiations with Euro-American discourses could be mapped through the emergence of new discursive forms that carry within them cross-cultural aesthetic dimensions, such as *kagunan* in Indonesia, *siwilai* in Thailand, and the *ilustracion* in the Philippines (Flores 2013).

The beginning of cross-regional history was often curatorially driven, a pioneering endeavour undertaken by the Japanese since the late 1970s. Australia joined from the 1990s onwards, as Australia’s unique location – alongside its geo-political tilt under Prime Minister Paul Keating in the 1990s – enabled a number of important cultural enterprises, including the Modernism and Post-modernism in Asian Art conference at the Australian National University in 1991 (Clark 1993b). The field that had hitherto remained country-specific was increasingly being thought in regional terms. Recently, cross-regional comparisons have been attempted in large-scale collaborative curatorial undertakings in exhibitions like *Cubism in Asia: Unbounded Dialogues* (2005) and *Realism in Asia* (2010).

Such fluid configurations signal continuous endeavours to undo the aphorism spelt out at the beginning of the twentieth century by Okakura Kakuzo – ‘Asia is one’ (Okakura 1903: 1) – by dislodging deterministic articulations of a fixed pan-Asian identity. Instead, the region indexes both the temporal and the geographic as elements that shape the contingencies and motivations behind the history of contesting visions of the world. This world appears ‘as a process necessarily in formation, rather than

as a circumstance over which artists, critics and artworks had no control’, in which art operates as a means to ‘practice the world’ (Kee 2013: 24). Through such commitments we might find the capacity to rethink art history’s motivations and investments, and to think about our visual patrimony on a global scale.

NOTES

1. See Piyadasa, R. and T.K. Sabapathy (1979).
2. Singapore was governed as a separate British Crown Colony after the Second World War, when the rest of the Straits Settlements and Malay States under British Protectorate were administratively merged. The Federation of Malaya gained its independence on 31 August 1957. Four of these territories – Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah), and Sarawak – came together to form Malaysia on 16 September 1963. Singapore left Malaysia on 9 August 1965.
3. State-sponsored large-scale salon exhibitions like Japan’s *Bunten* or *Teiten*, which began in 1907, were held in Taiwan as *Taiten* and later *Futen* from 1927–43. Korea’s version was called *Senten* and was held from 1922–44.
4. The New Culture Movement responded to disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture. It sought to break with China’s feudal past by promoting egalitarian values, vernacular literature, the popularization of the arts, a critical revaluation of Confucian values, and an embrace of modern thought and culture.
5. Artists in the Regnault collection for the 1939 exhibition include: Marc Chagall, Giorgio de Chirico, Charles Dufresne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Vassily Kandinsky, Jean Lurçat, Jules Pascin, Pablo Picasso, Odilon Redon, etc.
6. Ironically the *Nika-kai* (The Second Society) was established in 1914 as a progressive platform against the perceived conservatism of the governmental *Bunten* (Ministry of Education Exhibition).

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PART II

SOUTH ASIA



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CHAPTER NINE

TOUSLED TEMPORALITIES

Modernist practices and intellectual-political currents in South Asia



*Saurabh Dube*¹

In South Asia, a certain haziness regarding modernism and modernity derives not only from the manner in which they can be elided with each other, but the fact that they are both frequently filtered through the optics of modernization. At stake is the acute, albeit altering, importance of being modern – as a person, a nation, and a people. This is true not only of quotidian common sense but of scholarly sentiments. Here, modernization implicitly entails pervasive projections of material, organizational, and technological – as well as economic, political, and cultural – transformation(s), principally envisioned in the looking-glass of Western development. In this scenario, tacitly at least, different, often hierarchically ordered, peoples are seen as succeeding (or failing) to evolve from their traditional circumstance to arrive at a modernized order. Indeed, motifs of modernization, carrying wide implication, readily draw together mappings of modernism, modernity, and (being) modern, such that each shores up the other.²

OVERTURE

Why should this be the case? To begin with, a crucial characteristic of dominant descriptions of the modern and modernity has hinged on their positing of the phenomena as marked by a break with the past, a rupture with tradition, and a surpassing of the medieval (see Dube 2010). Here, through ruses of teleological historical progress, stages of civilization, and social evolutionist schemas, by the second half of the nineteenth century, across much of the world, an exclusive West was increasingly presented as the looking-glass for the imagining of universal history. As worldly knowledge, borne alike by empire and nation, oriented not merely toward ordering but simultaneously remaking the world, these neat proposals and their formative presumptions variously entered the lives of South Asian subjects. On the Indian subcontinent, across the twentieth century, such principles and presuppositions were first disseminated as ways of approaching social worlds, and soon instituted as tissues of experience and affect within everyday arenas, at the very least among the middle classes. In this scenario, the blueprints of modernization actually distilled the meanings of the modern, articulating an imaginary but palpable, distended and

aggrandizing West/Europe as history, modernity, and destiny – for each society, culture, and people. In artistic, intellectual, and aesthetic arenas, modernism(s) in South Asia have variously, often critically, engaged with these projections and presuppositions: but they have also been unable to easily escape their long shadow.³

A key characteristic of modernism at large has been to emphasize the difference of the contemporary present from past epochs. Within South Asian modernisms, this claim of a surpassing of the past was variously inflected by the gravity of anti-colonial and nationalist imaginaries, the weight of memory and history, the pull of the mythic and the primitive, and the burden of a violent independence and post-colonial politics. This is to say, these endeavours, inhabiting ‘multiple constellations throughout the twentieth century’, appeared critically shot through by ‘a dialectical process of invoking, resisting, or negotiating questions of tradition, identity, and experience’ (Sunderason 2011: 246). It followed, too, that ruptures with prior artistic moments within the subcontinental aesthetic landscape – alongside engagements with wider modernist imaginaries – instilled these tendencies with rather specific energies.⁴ Together, imbued with dense, particular histories and shaped by distinct, tousled temporalities, South Asian modernisms bear their own twists and quite discrete textures.

In what follows, I shall elaborate these first formulations by exploring varied intellectual-political currents, broadly understood, that informed distinct modernist moments, cutting across different forms of aesthetic production in South Asia. Here, such underpinnings have to be culled from within modernist practices themselves, since the many influences were yet sieved and reworked through self-directed aesthetics. This is to say that modernist practices on the subcontinent critically communicated with each other and with those in other parts of the world – as well as with intellectual currents across the continents – while often exceeding the more formal scholarly currents in South Asia, which in turn could be somewhat readily derivative of the West. Indeed, the modernist practices/forms under discussion drew upon resources of myth, epic, and history at large, not as mere representations of the past, but as a resource that helped to intimate a present/future, a rupture with the prior, in the creation of a distinctively Indian modern. All of this insinuates rather specific intellectual configurations. In other words, this chapter offers a rather particular argument about how we might approach modernist practices as bound to intellectual-political underpinnings and their particular articulations, foregrounding thereby multiple yet overlaying temporalities and trajectories of modernisms in South Asia.

GENEALOGIES

By the beginning of the twentieth century, British rule was 150 years old on the Indian subcontinent. This period had seen shifting, layered entanglements and conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized: the suppression of dynamic yet contentious processes turning on indigenous authority and political economy; the containment of fluid borders between field and forest; and the subordination of the Indian economy to North Atlantic cycles of trade, profit-making, and consumption. On the one hand, the systematic destruction of forests, the conversion of commons into property, and the emphasis on increasing land revenue had led to the lineaments

of an agrarian order consisting of settled agriculture and specialist commodity production, marked by relatively clear groupings of caste and community. This had lasting legacies for the nationalist and imperial imaginaries, including modernist ones: village, agricultural, and caste arrangements that had acquired their distinct terms and textures principally across the nineteenth century were now rendered as ageless, millennia-old, innate attributes of Indian civilization. On the other hand, this extended epoch had witnessed uneven yet acute articulations of colonial urbanism, entailing debates on the content of tradition and formations of gender on the subcontinent, religious negotiations of evangelical encounters, nationalist contestations of colonial claims, and varied experiments with European traditions in the letters, arts, and politics.

Against the backdrop of these twin, broad-based movements, crucial for formations of aesthetics in South Asia, I recount a vignette from the early twentieth century.

On 7 May 1921 the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore celebrated his sixtieth birthday in Weimar, and used the opportunity to visit the Bauhaus [...]. [Soon], at Tagore's suggestion, a selection of Bauhaus works was shipped to Calcutta to be exhibited, in December 1922. [...] Among the exhibits (which mysteriously never returned to Europe) were two watercolours by Wassily Kandinsky and nine by Paul Klee, [and a larger number of other pieces by many different artists]. [...] The exhibition was well received, but [...] what was perhaps even more important about it was that a number of Cubist paintings by Rabindranath's nephew Gaganendranath Tagore and folk-primitivist works by his niece Sunayani Devi were also shown on this occasion.

(Chaudhuri 2010: 943–4)

At least three points stand out. First, at stake in the exhibition was a break with the formidable influence of prior nationalist art, especially the Orientalism of the Bengal School. If the Bengal School configured a counter-colonial, 'pan-Asian' style of narrative painting as part of *Swadeshi* nationalism (1905–11), while opposing the academic naturalism of narrative art, now a newer disposition came to the fore.⁵ Thus, one form of counter-colonial sensibility, appealing to bourgeois nationalists, was replaced by a modernist anti-imperial imaginary, which would soon draw on the energies of the subcontinental popular.

Second, rather more than the ready influence of the Bauhaus (or of Europe/West, at large), it is the experiments of Gaganendranath – and, in a different way, those of Sunayani – that appear as an inaugural moment of the modernist idiom in Indian art. None of this involved a mere imitation of European modernism. Actually, discussed as part of the quest for 'artistic autonomy' in the modernist journals of the day, in Gaganendranath's work, 'a dynamic, fluid, mysterious play of light and shade and color' replaced 'the relatively static geometry of Analytical Cubism', revealing also 'an imagination steeped in literature and myth' (Chaudhuri 2010: 944–5; see also Mitter 2007: 18–27).

Third, while Gaganendranath's work remained something of an exception in terms of its broader impact, the folk imaginary underlying the art of his sister Sunayani had wide implications. It not only affected the primitivist motifs of the artist Jamini Roy, a point usually acknowledged, but arguably formed an integral

part of larger expressions of primitivism and ruralism in modernist art in India. Such manifestations were shaped by distinct configurations of anti-colonial nationalism on the subcontinent.

Until the end of the 1910s, Indian nationalism had remained a principally middle-class (and elite) phenomenon, despite some attempts during the Swadeshi period to draw in popular participation in nationalist agitation. All this was to change from the beginnings of the 1920s as M.K. Gandhi took decisive steps to transform Indian nationalism, turning the Indian National Congress into a firm grouping with an organizational structure and regular membership (rather than a forum that met at the end of each year). Gandhi's political strategy was to draw in the participation of the Indian 'masses', especially the peasants, yet to do so in a rigorously controlled manner, such that the subalterns obeyed and followed the Congress leadership. At the same time, the nationalist endeavour to 'discipline and mobilize' was equally accompanied by Gandhian ideology and practice that struck an acutely anti-industrial, anti-urban note. Here were to be found an imaginatively counter-modern cadence, turning on a critique of Western civilization, a valorization of the village and tradition, and an innately moral politics. The subaltern groups in turn came to articulate their own, supplementary anti-colonial politics and understandings of nationalism, which acceded yet exceeded official and middle-class understandings.⁶

All these developments were variously articulated with expressions of folk and primitivist imaginaries in modernist Indian art.⁷ There were different trajectories here. Nandalal Bose, who presided over the art school at Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan, conjoined folk styles, bold brush-strokes, and outdoor murals in an eclectic practice. This served to engender an aesthetic discourse rooted in the community, including through Bose's association with Gandhi that led the artist to produce wall panels for the Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress in 1938. Arguably, this association of nationalism, community, and (the insistence on) a formal clarity acquired distinct dimensions among Bose's students, even as their experiments bore testimony to the critical autonomy of aesthetic traditions. Thus, if the painter K.G. Subramanyan honed an expressive, imaginative, figurative style, the sculptor Ramkinkar Baij – a remarkable talent from a humble background and with scant formal education – represented the lives of the Adivasi Santals, creating monumental outdoor sculptures of these subjects in cement, rubble, and concrete, to showcase thereby a 'subaltern modernism'.

Taken together, here was a querying of the colonial connection with a bourgeois modern, articulations of the national dynamic with an avant-garde modern, and explorations of the critical contours of a (contending, 'primitivist') modern. At the same time, in formations of modernist imaginaries in South Asia, the density and gravity of artistic interchanges also often exceeded the formal influence – intellectual and ideological, aesthetic and political – of anti-colonial nationalism. Here, the Bengali artist Jamini Roy's primitivism arrived at striking modernist brevity through a simplification of form and an elimination of details. Drawing on folk forms while rooting his work in local artisanal practice, Roy created an art at odds with colonial urban culture precisely through its intrinsic valorization of the community (and the communitarian) in actual aesthetic practice. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's own modernist internationalism in art was not only founded on critical intimations of the 'illegitimacy of nationalism' (Nandy 1994), but his forceful, mask-like, virtually

totemic images were an acute expression of what Partha Mitter has described as ‘the dark landscape of the psyche’ (71). Finally, away from Bengal, painting in north India, Amrita Sher-Gill’s primitivist art, at once formatively modernist and startlingly cosmopolitan – drawing comparisons with her Mexican contemporary, Frida Kahlo – far exceeded merely ‘indigenous’ influences. It intimated instead a politics of art that refuses to be reduced to prescribed ideology, and one that yet awaits understanding, especially in terms of its rethinking the content of tradition and debating the nature of modernity.⁸

FORMATIONS

From the 1920s onwards, anti-colonial nationalism, drawing in popular participation, appeared accompanied by connected yet contending tendencies, socialism and communism, which could all now form compelling friendships and forge intimate enmities. These intellectual-political impulses had a profound impact on the arts – from painting to literature to theatre to cinema – in the 1940s. These tumultuous times of famine and suffering, an anti-fascist war and subaltern struggles, the end of empire and intimations of independence saw the formations of progressive organizations such as the Indian People’s Theatre Association and various artist groups. This wider

left cultural movement sought to create in art a distinct ‘popular’ – ‘national in form, socialist in content’ – and in its wake, it brought together artists, writers, and performers in a common platform to fashion the idiom of progressive art.

(Sunderason 2011: 252)

Even as these initiatives were being expressed, the subcontinent gained independence from British imperial rule, itself accompanied by the Partition of its landmass and people into two nations, India and Pakistan (West and East). The hopes and desires for freedom of the new nations were fragmented, even split, by the violence that marked their Partition. While estimates vary, between 200,000 and 1.5 million Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs were killed in the violence, including reciprocal genocide; around 75,000 women of these communities were raped and/or abducted; and a little less than 15 million people were displaced, losing home and belonging across new national borders. Some of the split nature of these processes was captured by Nehru, the formidable statesman-architect as well as ideologue-rhetorician of a modernist nationalism, in his ‘tryst with destiny’ speech, delivered at the stroke of the midnight hour on 15 August 1947 (qtd. in Banerjee-Dube 2015: 437).⁹

Yet much of this failed to convince modernist artists and authors. While the communist slogan ‘*Yah azadi jhooti hai* (This freedom is a lie)’ did not prove persuasive, the recognition of a truncated freedom, a compromised independence, and Partition’s violence haunted the modernist imagination at large. Nor were these spectres laid to rest as India embarked on a vigorous programme of nation-building, based on a governmentally planned economy, state presence in heavy industry, and the building of large dams and other monumental public works. Indeed, what came to the fore was a nation and society lacking in soul and spirit. Against this were variously pitted issues of artistic autonomy, aesthetic independence, individual

alienation, and social commitment in the quest for a modern that was avant-garde in expression yet Indian in essence – imagination and practice in which epic, legend, and myth often played a critical role. Here, I provide a series of juxtapositions from different art forms.

In the wake of independence and partition, modernisms in South Asia saw an acute overlaying of artistic technique and the force of the past, an incessant interchange between the density of aesthetic traditions and the urgency of the present. This present had to be made modern – for the people, for the nation-in-the making, with its flaws and fractures. Some of this is clarified by the terms of theatre in the mid twentieth century. The activities of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) turned on progressive performances, realist drama, and social critique, aimed toward 'cultural awakening' among the people of the subcontinent. At the same time, rather than being subsumed by a limited aesthetic-politics of agitation and propaganda, here were to be found innovations that drew upon the resources of realism in order to reveal rather other glimmers of modernist theatre. Unsurprisingly, in the terrain of theatre in South Asia, the social impact drama of the 1940s was followed by cutting-edge developments, which critically, imaginatively articulated epic and the avant-garde, myth and the contemporary, legend and the present in expressions of modernism, developments that yet remain insufficiently conceptualized.

Unsurprisingly, in 'progressive' endeavours in the plastic arts, questions of a practice that was adequate to an emergent era, an inviting internationalism, and a modern art came to be of critical import. In such a scenario, what was the precise place of a new nation within a novel aesthetic? Did the former implicitly uphold the latter, providing the space and support for key emergences? Or, did the nation hinder aesthetic autonomy? It followed that these artistic efforts could follow different directions, but none could escape the demands of avant-garde autonomy. Thus, the most influential of these artists' organizations, whose prominence came to virtually eclipse that of the others, the Progressive Artists' Group (of Bombay), which was founded at the end of 1947 as a response to the Partition, spoke not only of a radical break from the past, but of an autonomy of the work of art itself: 'Absolute freedom for content and technique, almost anarchic' (cited in Sunderason 2011: 254).

At the same time, the articulations of such autonomy were deeply entangled with the density of myth and memory. Indeed, these resources could be a means of unravelling the pain of the Partition, the puzzle of the nation, the ambiguity of identity, and the force of exile. Two salient examples, both emerging from the Progressive Artists' Group and each extending from the 1940s into our present, should suffice. In the work of M.F. Hussain, who came from a disadvantaged Muslim background, altered cubist configurations entered into conversations with prior traditions of Indian sculpture and miniature paintings, while he sieved the resources of epics, legends, gods, and goddesses to construe a distinctive modernist idiom.¹⁰ Similarly, the art of F.N. Souza, a Catholic, who fiercely guarded his autonomy in exile, conjures a formidable expressionism that is ever tied to figures and forms of a distinctive past. Here are to be found crucifixes and the (black) Christ, last suppers and erotic nudes, the mother and child, each drawing in the textures and tangles of a vernacular Christianity and everyday aesthetic from Goa in western India, all held in place by the conjuring of 'a God, who is not a God of gentleness and love, but rather of suffering, vengeance and terrible anger' (Mullins 1962: 40).

Consider now that literary modernisms in the mid twentieth century engaged at once with related genres in the rest of the world while seeking also to express a specific modern on the subcontinent. This could reveal formative tensions and critical creativity, as suggested by the two most significant figures of Hindi modernism Ajneya (S.H. Vatsyayan) and G.M. Muktibodh. On the one hand, Ajneya stressed a ‘formalist universalism’, concentrating on ‘poetic structure, rather than on social or historical problems’, while emphasizing the immense isolation and alienation of the modern individual (Chaudhuri 2010: 956). On the other, Muktibodh’s ‘intensely self-conscious, anguished poetic voice abandoned the high modernism of Europe and America for experimental, radical, sometimes surreal sequences that draw equally upon the Bhakti tradition of late medieval India as upon other literatures of Asia, Africa, and Latin America’, construing new configurations of the mythic and the epic (Chaudhuri 2010: 956).

Finally, mid twentieth-century cinema in the subcontinent straddled realist representations and innovative aesthetics that reached far beyond a mere ‘national allegory’ and adroitly drew together the aural and the visual, sensibility and technique, dance and drama, and the ‘old’ and ‘new’. Thereby, it cast alienated individuals at the centre yet set them adrift, showed the finger to promises of progress, sieved the contradictions of imagined worlds, held up a mirror to the lies of nation, and looked into the eye of a living ghost, India’s partition and its intimate violence. Now the auteur and the actor, new flâneurs both, could frequently, grimly move through the restless scuttle of quotidian creatures, facing up to the immanent possibility of an unclimatic end. Here was cinema – of Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray, but also of Guru Dutt and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, among many others – that recast mythology, rethought history, and reworked the contemporary in probing and unravelling the innocence and idea of India.¹¹

EMERGENCES

These mid twentieth-century modernists had arguably anticipated the unravelling of the South Asian nations from the 1960s onwards. If in Pakistan such undoing entailed the central place of authoritarian governments and military regimes, in India the idealism of the past was replaced by a manipulative politics, cynical invocations of socialism, and attacks on democratic norms – all in the name of the nation, unity, and progress. Unsurprisingly, the birth of Bangladesh, aided by India, was among the last gasps of Bandung-era, third-world nationalism. What came to the fore were not only the governmental registers of a politics of violence, exemplified by the state of Emergency (1975–7) in India, the execution of Z.A. Bhutto in Pakistan, and escalating ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka, but increasingly newer openings/orientations toward corporate capital, the political-religious Right, and a neo-liberal imagination. These developments have been accompanied by lower-caste assertions, subaltern struggles, armed left militancy, popular-democratic endeavours, and feminist (as well as alternative sexuality) interventions.

In front of these developments, salient tendencies have redefined issues of art, literature, and temporality in modernisms in South Asia. Here are two examples. The first concerns the narrative moment (and ‘movement’) from the 1970s onwards, which has posed critical questions of what constitutes properly modernist artistic

practice in an independent India – a nation that had betrayed its dispossessed, both people and art, the one bound to the other. Here are to be found re-visitations – by women and men artists – of epic and legend, myth and history, the past and the present in acutely figurative and explicitly narrative ways within the visual arts, including cinema. These procedures and representations have foregrounded questions of the majority and the minority, the body and pain, gender and sexuality, and the entitled and the popular.¹² The second key development, which began in the 1950s but acquired formidable force a decade later, involves Dalit ('broken') literature and art, expressing the anguish and anger of India's ex-untouchables. Here is a break not just with prior artistic traditions, but a rupture with the civilizational claims of a society and a nation, through endeavours that have brought into being a new language and idioms, a novel iconography and imaginaries, including distinct emphases on issues of gender intimating also a Dalit feminist practice.¹³ Clearly, modernist temporalities, modalities, and expressions continue to find distinct articulations of intellectual-political currents and social-cultural matrices in South Asia today.

NOTES

1. Research and reading for this chapter were conducted as a Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study (STIAS), South Africa, and I gratefully acknowledge STIAS' support.
2. For a wider discussion see Dube 2011, especially 1–10.
3. Unsurprisingly, in scholarship on modernism in India, modernization and modernity are uneasily folded into understandings of modernism. See, for example, Kapur, Chaudhuri, and Mitter.
4. For an understanding of modernity as turning on heterogeneous-yet-interlocking histories, which extend across the past five centuries, such that modernization and modernism appear as crucial yet partial components in the broader articulation of modernity, see Dube 2011.
5. See Guha-Thakurta.
6. See I. Banerjee-Dube.
7. The two paragraphs that follow draw upon Mitter and Chaudhuri.
8. See also Kapur.
9. The place and presence of Nehru's writing, politics, and persona in expressions of modernism on the subcontinent require greater understanding.
10. There could be frontal artistic engagements with the Partition, too, as in the writings of Sadaat Hasan Manto (in Urdu) and of Khushwant Singh (in English).
11. The mainly monumental designs of architectural modernism in India – in the wake of Lutyen's New Delhi and the presence of Le Corbusier's city of Chandigarh, the latter built with the blessings of Nehru – tell a rather different story, for which there is little space here.
12. See Kapur and Sheikh (ed.).
13. See, for example, Tartakov (ed.) and Garawala.

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CHAPTER TEN

BEYOND THE MASTERS

Modernism in South Asian architecture



Kathleen James-Chakraborty

That modern architecture in South Asia almost always denotes a handful of canonical buildings, most designed by foreign architects, and typically erected between 1950 and 1970, says as much about modern architecture as it does about the subcontinent, where in fact modern architecture and design have flourished because of enthusiastic local patronage since the 1930s, and continue to do so today. Modernism in architecture typically entails the pairing of an abstract, often industrial aesthetic, with construction in new building materials, especially iron or steel, reinforced concrete, and glass. Although its European instigators insisted during the 1920s that it arose directly out of industrialization, its popularity in South Asia proved that it could flourish independently of substantial technological innovation. Modern architecture proved popular in the region because it was inexpensive, easy to construct, and communicated an optimistic sense of progress that broke free of the substantial use that British colonizers had made of precedents established by the Mughal emperors who controlled most of the region from the second quarter of the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries and the Rajput potentates who at times numbered among their most important vassals and at other times operated independently.

The main showcases of South Asian modern architecture remain the buildings constructed just after mid-century by Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn in Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, and Dhaka, arguably supplemented by those of Edward Durrell Stone, who enjoyed a more contentious relationship with mainstream modernism, realized in New Delhi and Islamabad. Equally important are the works of local professionals, above all Charles Correa, Balkrishna Doshi, and Raj Rewal in India, Geoffrey Bawa in Sri Lanka, and Mazhural Islam in Bangladesh, although as these men began to engage indigenous vernacular tradition, they became associated, especially in the 1980s, with postmodernism. Preliminary to all of this, however, were the art deco-flavoured buildings erected before independence.

By the 1930s, there were multiple channels through which modern architecture was arriving in India, where it was making use of the technical expertise introduced by the military engineers who imported reinforced concrete at the beginning of the century. The first were the local architects, many of whom were still British (architectural education commenced in India only in 1913; throughout the colonial

period and arguably ever since it has remained the stepchild of engineering). With access to the latest journals from London, they appreciated the combination of reinforced concrete construction and simplified art deco detailing, as did their clients. The glamorous apartment blocks lining Marine Drive in Bombay were built and often also occupied by wealthy Parsis, members of a community with a history of being in the local stylistic vanguard. Far simpler versions of these were built, also in part out of concrete, in the middle-class suburbs, where, lacking elevators, they usually housed one or two families on each of two to four stories (Rao 2012).

Foreign talent was more often associated with one-off projects. Calcutta's influential Metro Cinema (1935) was designed by the American-based Thomas Lamb, as part of the international expansion of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer chain. In 1929, the Maharaja of Indore hired Eckart Muthesius, whose father had been a key figure in turn-of-the-century German modernism, to design and furnish his new palace (Niggel 1996). While the building lacked the spatial sophistication associated with the European avant-garde, the furnishings were by a who's who of cutting edge designers, including Eileen Gray and Charlotte Perriand. Far removed from such ostentatious indulgence, but more refined in its approach to the integration of form and material, was Anthony Raymond's Golconde Dormitory for the Shri Aurobindo Ashram in the French enclave of Pondicherry, completed in 1942 (Helfrich and Whitaker 2006: 170–3). Here, concrete was left exposed rather than covered in stream-lined stucco ornament, and a system of moveable double louvres, one in concrete and one in teak, facilitated natural ventilation.

The Second World War and the Partition created a caesura, however, between these early experiments and the modern architecture of post-independence South Asia, especially in India. Although some of the country's new civic infrastructure, such as the Vidhana Soudha (State Legislature) of Karnataka, completed in Bangalore in 1956, was exuberantly historicist, rivalling even the grandest of the princely palaces erected during the Raj, the British mastery of the architectural vocabulary employed by Hindus and Muslims alike over the course of particularly the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries left many intellectuals and leading political figures eager for alternatives. The result would be some of the most monumental and influential modern buildings erected anywhere.

One circle of advocates for modernism clustered in Bombay, where the magazine *Marg*, founded in 1946, became the mouthpiece of the Modern Architectural Research Group. Edited by Mulk Raj Anand and funded largely by the Tatas, a wealthy family of Parsi industrialists engaged in many modernizing activities, *Marg* was the premiere periodical devoted to the history of India's visual arts. The architect Otto Königsberger, a German-Jewish émigré who sat out the war in India, was a crucial figure in advocating not only for modern architecture but also for planning informed by the Charter of Athens, a translation into English of which *Marg* published in 1949 (Lee and James-Chakraborty 2013). Königsberger subsequently planned the new Orissi capital of Bhubaneswar before undertaking an influential career teaching tropical architecture at the Architectural Association in London, but the most important fruit of Indian interest in modern planning principles would be the new Punjabi capital of Chandigarh.

No less a figure than Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India from 1947 until his death in 1964, supervised the selection of its architect. Originally entrusted to

Matthew Nowicki, a Polish immigrant to the United States whose career was cut short by his death in a plane crash, responsibility for its design was then awarded to Le Corbusier. The Swiss-born architect, a resident of Paris, executed the plan of the city and built its three major civic structures: the Secretariat, the High Court, and the Legislative Assembly. His cousin and former partner, Pierre Jeanneret, shared responsibility for the original housing with the British couple Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew (Prakash 2002).

Le Corbusier's contribution to Chandigarh, beginning in 1951, entailed a complete rejection of the decorative flourishes that had, with the important exception of Raymond's work in Pondicherry, conveyed the sophistication of prewar modernism. At a time when modernism was supposedly universal, responses to extreme climate encouraged this approach. Bold sun-breaks and breeze-throughs did not work as well here as in Pondicherry, but provided a vocabulary of ruggedly exposed concrete expressive of their construction that would prove to have international resonance. Although Le Corbusier's approach to concrete differed little to that he had taken at the Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, France (1947–52), the shapes into which he cast them here were distinctively Indian. Nehru and his other Indian patrons sought in Chandigarh a badge of post-independence Indian modernity that would diverge definitively from the adaptive reuse the government was making of the British-built city of New Delhi, laid out by Edwin Lutyens beginning in 1914 (Irving 1981). There, colonial authorities had demanded the integration of recognizably Indian motifs into a Garden City plan with classical architecture. In place of the industrial aesthetic for which he had become famous in the 1920s, Le Corbusier substituted abstracted references to indigenous architecture, above all the open pavilions of Shah Jahan's seventeenth-century forts in Agra, Delhi, and Lahore. The exception was the way in which he adapted the cooling stack of a modern power plant, extruded through the roof, to serve as the assembly chamber.

In addition to his work in Chandigarh, Le Corbusier built two houses, a museum, and a headquarters for the local Mill Owners' Association in what was then still the Gujarati state capital of Ahmedabad (Curtis 1986: 202–12). Due above all to the patronage of wealthy mill owners, especially members of the Sarabhai family, Ahmedabad would become the showcase of modern Indian architecture during the 1960s. Here, in addition to important work by a second foreign star, the American Louis Kahn, the careers of two of India's most influential architects would be launched. The project manager for Le Corbusier's Ahmedabadi projects was the young Balkrishna Doshi. Teaching first at the newly launched National Institute of Design and then at the Centre for Environment, Planning and Technology (CEPT), which he founded in 1962, Doshi became India's leading architectural educator as well as one of its most admired architects (Steele 1998).

The presence of Le Corbusier and Doshi in the city attracted Charles Correa, one of the first Indian architects to have studied in the United States. In 1958 he began the design of the Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, a museum that doubled as a visitor's centre to the modest ashram where Mahatma Gandhi had lived from 1917 to 1930 (Correa 1996: 30–5). Widely hailed at the time as appropriately understated, his collection of square pavilions, each capped by a pyramidal tiled roof, showed the influence of Kahn's recently completed Trenton Bath Houses (1955), which Correa transposed from concrete into brick. The success of the Gandhi Museum encouraged



Figure 10.1 Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, Charles Correa, Ahmedabad, India, 1958–63.
Photo: Nishalp, CC BY – SA 2.5. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>

Doshi and his patrons to invite Kahn in 1962 to design the Indian Institute of Management (Kahn's contribution was completed in 1974; later distinguished additions have been made to the complex by his former collaborator Anant Raje and by Bimal Patel).

The commission was one of three Kahn would receive that year from the subcontinent. He was also asked to contribute to the new Pakistani capital of Islamabad, although that was later awarded instead to his fellow American Edward Durrell Stone, and to build the National Assembly (completed posthumously in 1983) in Dhaka, in what was then East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. Kahn's buildings in Ahmedabad and Dhaka fused abstraction, complete with multi-storey geometric cutouts; a truth-to-materials approach to construction, whether employing low-tech brick or more modern exposed concrete; and the layered spaces shared by ancient Roman and medieval and early modern South Asian architecture. The results, austere and often overpowering, were directly inspired by local conditions, including both climate and spatial practices, and have had an enduring impact upon later architecture across the region (Brownlee and De Long 1991; Goldhagen 2001: 162–98; Curtis 2012).

Le Corbusier and Kahn's monumentality were not the only imported civic architecture influences at the time, however. Upon its completion in 1958, Stone's American embassy in New Delhi was widely heralded for the way in which it created an elegant alternative, suitable to the climate and infused with references to Mughal



Figure 10.2 National Assembly, Louis Khan, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1962–83.
Photo: Justintravels, CC BY 2.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

architecture, to conventional Western office buildings. Indeed it could be argued that the United States erected modern embassies around the world, despite the fact that the style was often derided as Communist at home, in order to garner the support of local post-independence elites, like the one that welcomed this so warmly. Stone went on to contribute the much less original Presidential Estate to Islamabad, a city designed, beginning in 1960, with the participation of a number of Western experts, including the Greek planner Constantinos Doxiadis (James-Chakraborty 2008; Loeffler 2010).

By the 1980s, India's leading local architects were mounting comprehensive challenges to the architecture and urbanism of the heroic modernism imported into the subcontinent by foreign stars (Bhatt and Scriver 1991). A mixture of an awareness of the emergence of postmodernism abroad and attentiveness to specifically Indian precedents and social circumstances informed their work. Correa and Raj Rewal were particularly concerned with reviving denser models of urban planning, although these were usually implemented in suburban locations outside city centres. Correa's housing in Belapur in New Bombay (1983–6) provided a model that could be easily extended by its working-class inhabitants (Correa 2000); Rewal's Asian Games Village in Delhi (1982), although designed for better-off inhabitants, was rooted in the recall of traditional housing, such as the *havelis* of Jaisalmer (Taylor 1991). While Rewal's complex structures also recalled modernist megastructures, Correa in the 1970s and 1980s certainly kept one eye on postmodernism. His *Cidade de Goa*

(1979–82) hotel in the former Portuguese enclave of which he was a native was clearly inspired by Charles Moore’s scenographic approach; parts of it were a fictive stage set inhabited by painted figures. Yet elite clients in particular, as well as many of their more humble counterparts, were almost always less enthusiastic than architects attentive to their international reputations; in consequence, modernism remained popular, if far from universal, across the subcontinent.

Another architect who fused the local and the abstract in buildings that flirted with postmodernism and garnered international attention was the Sri Lankan Geoffrey Bawa (Robson 2002; Plesner 2013). Bawa’s courtyard houses balanced an attentiveness to local materials and climate with an astute awareness of the contribution that abstraction could make in providing showcases for the daily lives of the island’s cultural elite, while under the deep overhangs of its hipped roofs his parliament, completed in 1982, features abstractly gridded walls that protect the windows behind them from sun and rain. It also, of course, boasts all the requisite modern amenities (Vale 1992). Bawa’s work is often included under the heading ‘critical regionalism’, an approach to the integration of modern forms and respect for local materials and sites championed above all by Kenneth Frampton, Alexander Tzonis, and Liane Lefaivre (Frampton 1983; Tzonis, Lefaivre, and Stagno 2001).

An important precursor of this approach, as recognized by Tzonis and Lefaivre, was the Sri Lankan architect Minnette de Silva (Tzonis, Lefaivre and Stagno 2001: 30–4). Trained at the Architectural Association in London, she participated while in England in the seventh meeting of CIAM, the international congress of modern architects, as a member of the Modern Architect Research Group (MARG). Back home in Colombo, she built houses and apartments informed by the work of her friend Le Corbusier, but far more attuned to indigenous patterns of building. De Silva recognized the limitations both of aping Europe and of pretending that nothing had changed:

Our community and social needs should find regional expression in town plans, housing schemes and public buildings. What so often happens is that we copy the closed-in types of western buildings quite unsuited to our region, or adapt traditional architecture in an equally unsuitable way, forgetting that carved stone and wooden pillars belong to a social age of the past, and that it is merely ludicrous to make them concrete now.

(De Silva 1998: 126)

There were others who understood the challenges posed by the suitability for India of modernism. Both local and foreign-born architects advocated self-help and sustainability, as well as expressive sculptural forms, as more appropriate for both rural and urban settings. Here Laurie Baker, Joseph Stein, and Satish Gujral deserve particular mention. Although their work is not nearly as well known abroad as that of Le Corbusier and Kahn, or even Doshi, Correa, Rewal, and Bawa, it has almost certainly had at least an equal impact within India, if not the rest of the subcontinent, and is likely to continue to provide compelling points of departure for further developments.

The British-born Baker came to India in 1945 and remained there until his death in 2007. A Quaker, he eventually settled in Kerala, where he focused on designing

low-cost buildings. Baker emphasized the use of locally available materials, but he never stinted on quality, even though many of his structures were erected to serve as schools and hospitals to serve those of very modest means. He also designed prestigious institutions, such as the campus of the Centre for Development Studies, founded in Thiruvananthapuram in 1971. Baker was also extremely attentive to and far more effective than Le Corbusier at designing for tropical climates, using devices like pierced brick screens to control light while offering natural ventilation. His approach made him one of the gurus of sustainable architecture, a concept to which he adhered for decades before the term was popularized (Bhatia 2003). Although he eschewed the industrialization that had generated many modernist forms and materials, there is little sentimental or nostalgic about Baker's largely abstract architecture, which could have been built in no earlier era.

Stein, an American, arrived in India in 1950 to head the architecture department at the Bengal Engineering College; in 1955 he moved to Delhi, where he practised for 40 years. Stein's institutional buildings there, many of them clustered near the Lodi Gardens, were often funded by American organizations, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, interested in wooing the officially non-aligned Indian government and its most influential citizens. Stein's architecture was appropriately respectful; he would become as well a leading environmental activist. In the first of his major Indian commissions, the India International Centre, which opened in Delhi in 1962, Stein struck a careful balance between simple construction that could be executed by relatively unskilled labour using inexpensive modern materials and the creation of spaces elegant enough, not least in their sophisticated relationship to the surrounding landscape, to provide a fitting backdrop for prestigious cultural exchanges (White 1993).

Gujral is best known as an artist and sculptor. Born in what is now Pakistan, he trained as an artist in Lahore before Partition, and in Mexico afterwards. In 1980 he won the competition to design the Belgian embassy in Delhi. Gujral, like Kahn and Baker before him, chose exposed brick as the most appropriate material for combining a sense of monumental permanence with abstract form. His highly sculptural volumes, however, are far more eccentric and almost certainly demonstrate an awareness of German expressionism, even as their arches, like those of Kahn before him, recall both indigenous vernacular precedent and ancient Roman construction.

While until relatively recently few South Asians could afford the sleek industrial aesthetic Muthesius employed for the Maharaja of Indore, much about modern architecture suited the subcontinent. Concrete proved an inexpensive and durable material that could be used for almost every modern purpose from hovels to runways (Forty 2012). Abstraction, too, was cheaper than the alternatives, and often easier to maintain. The best buildings offered much more, a poetry of renunciation of means but not of effects, which was in keeping with the way the less spartan of Gandhi's successors originally envisioned an independent India. These men and women were sophisticates who nonetheless largely favoured the local: they wore Nehru suits and saris, listened to Indian classical music and Tagore songs, sent their daughters to learn classical dance, but understood when their sons snuck away from studying to watch Bollywood movies. They made an exception for architecture, not least because this was their tradition that the British had mastered best (Metcalf 1989; Scriver and Prakash 2007). Their descendents no longer believe in such conscious austerity. They

shop in glossy new malls for imported brands, but, for them, too, modernism – albeit one more often imported now from Hong Kong and Singapore than London, Paris, or New York – still communicates the new and the desire to be proudly up to date. Moreover, it remains easy to mix and match modern architecture and indigenous crafts, as de Silva and Bawa did already more than half a century ago.

Modern architecture remains alive and well in South Asia today. While the flamboyance nicknamed ‘Punjabi Baroque’ can be found across the subcontinent, so can relatively chaste apartment towers, multi-family houses, and villas, modest more often than grand, as well as office blocks and shopping complexes of all shapes and sizes, erected over the course of the last half century and more out of reinforced concrete frames with brick infill and stucco cladding, whose only ornament are balconies and cantilevered projections sheltering the windows and perhaps several different colours of paint (Gautam 1994). The apartment blocks typically sit on pilotis which shelter parked cars and occasionally also play spaces for children. In recent decades, tower-in-the-park urbanism has become increasingly popular in the major cities, where, clustered behind protective walls and gates, these apartment blocks provide a privileged slice of society, if not necessarily their servants, with access to well-maintained green areas and other recreational amenities. And, although there are no South Asian starchitects, the region’s leading practitioners, such as Correa’s son-in-law Rahul Mehrota, Studio Mumbai, and, in Bangladesh, Kashef Chowdhury, regularly publish in leading international magazines, receive teaching appointments at key architecture schools abroad, and attract favourable attention at events like the Venice Biennale (Gast 2007; Studio Mumbai 2011). Most importantly, modernism remains a living tradition across the subcontinent, one that has affected buildings in villages where no one has heard of Le Corbusier or Correa, but where creative responses to modern materials and local conditions continue to generate pragmatic versions of the forms they championed.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

MODERNISM AND FILM IN
SOUTH ASIA

An Indian perspective

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Rahul Sapra

Indian audiences were exposed to the new art of the projected motion picture in the same year as their British, American, and Russian counterparts with the premiere of the Lumière brothers' cinématographe showings in Bombay in 1896. In 1912, Dadasaheb Phalke, influenced by European films such as *The Life of Christ* (1910), made the first Indian feature film *Raja Harishchandra* (*King Harishchandra* [1912]), a mythological film based on the character Harishchandra from the Hindu epics. On the one hand, Indian cinema during the first half of the twentieth century was directly influenced by Euro-American films, but, on the other hand, the dominance of Indian religious and mythological subjects reinforced a nationalist identity posited against British colonial values. The religious content of Indian cinema, however, was not simply anti-British. It also questioned the conservative and fundamentalist elements in Indian cultural traditions. This combination of factors made Indian cinema a unique manifestation of a modernist aesthetics. In particular, even after the end of the colonial rule in the subcontinent, Indian modernist cinema remained consistently inconsistent and inherently contradictory by combining diverse genres such as melodrama with Italian neo-realism and German expressionism to create a cinematic form that fused the popular and political – a combination that also influenced Indian-Parallel cinema in the 1960s and 1970s.

Films are made in different languages in South Asia, but for the purpose of this chapter I focus mainly on the Indian film industry, which is the oldest and the largest film industry in South Asia. The geographical space known as South Asia is a fluctuating category, and can be equated with the Indian Subcontinent, or defined as one which encompasses a long list of countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Burma, and Tibet. Moreover, in the first half of the twentieth century, when modernist movements began to influence cinema around the world, India was a British colony that included contemporary Pakistan and Bangladesh (Pakistan came into existence in 1947, and East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971). Therefore, the use of the term Indian cinema in this essay generally refers to both Pakistan and Bangladesh, since both countries were influenced by Indian cinema even after independence. Furthermore, within India, films are made in over 20 different languages. In this chapter I focus on the influence of modernism

in the mainstream Hindi/Urdu film industry based in Bombay (now called Mumbai), on some aspects of Indian Parallel cinema, and I conclude with a brief section on Sri Lankan cinema.

Anil Saari's observation is a good beginning point to understand the modernist nature of Indian popular cinema: 'the popular Indian film [...] is an eclectic, assimilative, imitative, and plagiaristic creature that is constantly rebelling against its influences – Hollywood and European cinema and traditional Indian aesthetics and lifestyle' (Saari 2009: 3). He states that Indian cinema, from its inception in 1912, articulated the tension between tradition and modernity, and 'became a symbol of industrialization and of the new world society, as India sought to transform itself and enter the twentieth century. Indeed, the cinema became the new temple [...] [and] the film became an agent of liberation from the dogmatic, idealistic world of morality and religion' (7). Using some of the above characteristics, I would like to elaborate on the parallels between Indian and Western modernist cinema, and highlight the unique features of Indian modernism that rebelled against both Euro-American modernist influences and became an agent for India's modernization by liberating it from the burden of orthodox and conformist worldviews. In this context, a series of mythological films in the first half of the twentieth century questioned and redefined the blind acceptance of Indian religious beliefs. These mythological films borrowed from modernist films made in Europe and America, but in the process also questioned the imposition of Western values on India by asserting a distinct Indian identity in the colonial period. However, it would be simplistic to label Indian modernist cinema as anti-Western, since Indian film directors were consistently in dialogue with various developments in modernist cinema and used it to both entertain Indian audiences and, as mentioned above, to provide a critique of Indian society. For instance, Raj Kapoor's melodramatic films amalgamated Charlie Chaplin's cinema with Italian neo-realism, whereas Guru Dutt used German expressionism to provide a Marxist critique of post-independence India while addressing larger questions about the meaning and purpose of life.

REWRITING RELIGION

Phalke's recreations of age-old Indian tales such as *Raja Harishchandra*, *Lanka Dahan* (*The Burning of Lanka* [1917]), and *Krishna Janma* (*The Birth of Krishna* [1918]) set the ball rolling by putting old wine in new bottles, and thereby appropriating the new medium of cinema to generate an 'Indian' identity by attracting mass audiences who easily identified with familiar Indian mythological tales. Phalke was a special effects genius and experimented with a vast range of techniques including animation and alienation effects in a variety of films to recreate Indian mythological tales (Bose 2007: 53).

This genre of mythological films used Indian religions to fashion a national identity in the colonial period, but what is equally important is that it also challenged traditional religious practices and beliefs by dealing with significant social issues related to caste system, the status of women and untouchables, child marriage, economic disparity, and so on. The probing of tradition was in keeping with Gandhi's belief that Indian society must first prove itself worthy of self-rule by cleansing itself through a constructive programme of social reform. Given this context, *Achhut Kanya* (*The Untouchable*

Female), a Hindi film directed by Franz Osten in 1936, deals with the socially unacceptable love relationship of a Brahmin male and an untouchable female who is forced to sacrifice her life to save her lover's. Similarly, the Marathi language film *Sant Tukaram* (*Saint Tukaram*), directed by V. Damle and S. Fathelal in 1936, is based on the life of the Bhakti poet Sant Tukaram who was part of the powerful Bhakti movement, which started around CE 1000, that attacked the ritualism in Hindu religion, and as it 'gathered momentum [...] [it] transformed the entire socio-cultural situation in the subcontinent' (Burra 1981: 102). The film criticizes the social inequalities of the Hindu caste system with an efficient use of melodramatic songs.

MELODRAMA AND ITALIAN NEO-REALISM: INDIAN AND PAKISTANI CINEMA

The use of songs, however, did not undermine the realist portrayal of the society, which is evident in the films of Raj Kapoor, one of the most influential figures in Indian cinema. Raj Kapoor, as an actor, producer, and director, wore many hats, and his melodramatic films were heavily influenced by Charlie Chaplin's films and Italian neo-realist cinema. The heightened emotions conveyed by songs, on the one hand, invited the audience to identify with the travails of the characters. On the other hand, songs can also undermine the logical cohesion of the narrative. Consequently, as Saari points out, the songs, like

the anthology of poems [...] in a film may be as chaotic, fragmentary, and episodic in the essential unity as the narrative structure of the film's sequential framework [...]. In short, we therefore have two similarly chaotic anthologies – one of the poetic word [i.e., songs], the second of the visual sequence.

(Saari 2009: 19)

However, these 'two seemingly disparate anthologies coalesce into an effective entertainment mode' that is also an effective instrument for conveying an insightful philosophical worldview (19–20). The process of coalescence occurs because the poetic-content of the songs complements the theme of the plot. For instance, in Kapoor's *Awaara* (*The Tramp* [1951]), the famous song '*Awaara hoon, ghar-bar nahin, Kiseko mujhse pyaar nahin*' ('I am a vagabond, I have no home, no one loves me'¹) successfully communicates the theme of alienation and poverty in the film.

The representation of the struggles of the working class in *Awaara* highlights the immense influence of Chaplin on Kapoor. Kapoor's melodramas are a fusion of Chaplin's classical cinema and neo-realism as illustrated in the films of Vittorio De Sica, Roberto Rossellini, and Cesare Zavattini. Sica's *Bicycle Thief* heavily influenced Kapoor's *Awaara* and *Shree 420* (1955); both films critique the impact of modernization that allowed technological and consumerist culture to oppress the poor soon after India's independence. To highlight the impact of consumerism, in *Shree 420* Kapoor juxtaposes the Coca-Cola advertisement, 'Delicious – *Coca Cola* – Refreshing', with images of a downtrodden working class that exposes the gap between Jawahar Lal Nehru's economic policies and the harsh realities in post-independence India. Kapoor's socialist intent made him astonishingly popular in Soviet Russia and central Latin American countries. However, the impact of Western

cinema did not deter Kapoor from celebrating patriotism in his films and turning himself into the voice of India. The famous song from *Shree 420* glorifies Kapoor's Indian nationalism:

Mera Joota Hai Japani (My shoe is Japanese)
Yeh Patloon Englishitani (My pants are English)
Sir Pey Laal topi Russi (I wear a red Russian cap)
Phir Bhi Dil hai Hindustani (Yet my heart is Indian)²

Similar tendencies were also apparent in Pakistani cinema, which was not only heavily influenced by Indian musical melodramas, but it also attempted to fashion a national identity for Pakistan after partition in 1947. Films are made in several languages in Pakistan, such as Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushto etc., but Urdu was projected as the national language after partition in West Pakistan, and Bengali became the dominant language of East Pakistani (now Bangladesh) cinema. The first film made in Karachi, *Hamari Zaban* (*Our Language*), directed by Sheikh Hasan in 1955, strongly emphasized Urdu's 'importance as the national language' (Gazdar 1997: 46). Unlike Indian nationalism, which was defined in opposition to British India, the point of antagonism for Pakistani nationalism was Indian nationalism. Therefore, to reinforce Pakistani nationalism the government repeatedly restricted the exhibition of Indian films in Pakistan, but such restrictions ended up encouraging plagiarism of Indian films, which were and still are very popular in Pakistan. In 1958 after the Commander-in-Chief of the Army General Ayub Khan declared martial law, his regime used the Department of Film and Publication (DFP) to make a series of propaganda films. Mushtaq Gazdar observes that like Hitler's propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, the film *Nai Kiran* (*A New Ray of Light* [1959]) sponsored by the DFP 'had the well-defined objective of dismissing politicians and politics as corrupt and projecting the Field Marshal and his junta as saviours' (1997: 74). However, Gazdar adds that the Censor Board did permit productions of some secular and experimental films: Saifuddin Saif's Punjabi film *Kartar Singh* (1959) that makes a social statement about Hindu-Muslim amity, and H. Karda's *Jago Hua Sawera* (*Day Shall Dawn* [1959]) which did not conform to the conventions of mainstream Indian/Pakistani cinema (78). The internationally acclaimed *Jago Hua Sawera* was 'the first realistic and experimental movie of Pakistan' (78). This film, which is the story of the plight of fishermen in East Pakistan (contemporary Bangladesh), has been compared to the famous neo-realist director Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* that also deals with the sufferings of the Sicilian fishermen. Alamgir Kabir notes that *Jago Hua Sawera*'s 'opening sequence that portrays the homecoming of the fishermen just before sunrise is influenced by a similar sequence in Visconti's *La Terra Trema*' (1969: 71). However, the experimental film *Jago Hua Sawera* was an exception, since the genre of melodrama, influenced by mainstream Indian cinema, continued to dominate Pakistani cinema.

EXPRESSIONISM: GURU DUTT'S EXPERIMENTAL MAINSTREAM CINEMA

If Raj Kapoor was India's Charlie Chaplin, then Guru Dutt became its Orson Welles when he made *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers*) in 1959, the Indian equivalent to

Citizen Kane (1941). Unlike Kapoor, even while working within the constraints of mainstream cinema, Dutt successfully challenged both the form and content of traditional Indian cinema. Stylistically his films were always in dialogue with tenets of modernist cinema, particularly German expressionism, experimentation with light and shadow, the use of deep focus, and elaborate camera movements which complicated realism, but these stylistic approaches were conducted to address the complexities of the modern self. Saari observes that in the 1950s and early 1960s directors such as V. Shantaram, Bimal Roy, and Kapoor projected a vision that was primarily shaped by sociological factors and situations, whereas Guru Dutt addressed philosophical questions about the meaning and purpose of life (Saari 2009: 203). Therefore, his films were not confined to class issues, but were always in search of a holistic philosophical vision that could explain the meaning of life.

Dutt's films challenged the traditional content of Indian cinema: he questioned the idealization of family, re-examined the role of religion, provided a voice to the female characters, efficiently used melodramatic songs to convey harsh realities of post-independence India, and addressed the larger question about the meaning of the modern self. Dutt's most successful film *Pyaasa* (*The Thirsty One* [1957]) is a tale of a suffering poet Vijay who is unable to get his poetry published and is rejected by his beloved, family, and society. A prostitute, Gulabo, also an outcast, understands his poetic genius and gets his poems published towards the end of the film. To highlight the agony of the modern self, the opening scene of the film severs the connection between human beings and nature. Vijay's poetry, reminiscent of Romantic era poetry, praises the beauty of nature in the opening scene: '*Yeh haste hue phool, yeh mehka hua gulshan/Yeh rang main aur noor mein dubi huin raahen/Yeh phoolon ka ras peetey hue machalte hue bhanvare*' ('These smiling flowers, these fragrant gardens/This world filled with glorious colours, The nectar intoxicating the bees'). However, the notes turn tragic when the next frame shows a shoe stepping on the bee, rupturing the bond between man and nature: '*Mein doo bhi to kya doo tumhe eh shok naazaron. Ley dey ke mere pass kuch aason and kuch aahein*' ('What little have I to add to this splendour/ Save a few tears, a few sighs'). This theme of alienation and despair is developed in the rest of the film, especially through Dutt's innovative and experimental songs.

DUTT'S MODERNIST SONGS

Dutt did not compromise the melodramatic emotion of his songs, though the visuals of the songs rejected conventional choreography and staging. Song sequences 'generally serve the function of inviting the audience into the emotional universe of the characters on the screen', but paradoxically Dutt's song sequences attempted to detach audiences from the characters' emotion with the help of his unconventional visuals (Rockwell 2003: 122). For instance, on the surface, the opening song of *Pyaasa* sung by Gulabo seems typical of a romantic love song: '*Phir na kee jiye meri gustaf nighahoon ka gila/ Dekhiya pyaar se phir aapne ne dekha mujhko*' ('Lament not if I turn my face away/ your gaze is filled with such longing'). However, the song mocks mainstream romantic love-songs, since in reality Gulabo is a prostitute trying to lure Vijay, who follows her because she is unknowingly singing from a collection of his poems he has lost. At the end of the song, Gulabo kicks him out of the brothel,

since he has no money and he followed Gulabo only to recover his poems. The visuals of the songs, influenced by German expressionism, use contrasting light and shadow while showing facial close-ups. Gulabo's expressions remain visible as she entices Vijay, whose face remains obscure, making the audience interact in the awkward play of light and shadow.

Furthermore, by not following the tradition of portraying the prostitute as a '*tawaif*' (courtesan), the scene reframes prostitution as a profession, a product of capitalism. Gulabo does not dress up like a '*tawaif*', or dance in the brothel to entice customers, but also roams the city to fetch customers while wearing a saree and carrying a purse like a modern Indian woman. Dutt uses interactive visuals to portray the mental state of the film's characters. One of Dutt's trademarks is the use of the zoom to capture a character's alienation, as in Vijay's song: '*Jaane woh kaise log the jinke pyaar ko pyaar mila?*' ('Who were those people who got love in return for their love?').³ The camera focuses on Vijay as he begins to sing, and zooms away to emphasize his alienation, portraying him as a tragic victim posed like a crucified Christ. The use of Christian allegory along with Hindu religious motifs depicts the hybridization of Indian identity, created by the merging of the East and West in the colonial period.

Suresh Sinha, the protagonist of *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers* [1959]), Dutt's next film, was played by Dutt himself. Sinha was partly based on the character of Charles Foster Kane, who was portrayed by Welles in *Citizen Kane*. *Kaagaz Ke Phool* did not do well at the box office, but it is considered to be a masterpiece of modernist cinema due to its complex adaptation of German expressionism. The most significant moment is the song '*Waqt Ne Kiya, Kya Hasin Sitam*' ('The Sweet Sorrows Inflicted by Time'), one of the exemplars of German expressionism in Indian cinema: the use of the deep focus lens and the elaborate self-reflexive camera work portraying both cinema and life as an artifice. Suresh Sinha and the actress Shanti, his lover, meet inside a film studio when this song about the agony and absurdity of life is heard as a voice-over. The use of the deep focus lens effectively shows the distance between the two characters trapped inside the studio – a metaphor for the universe – but who are unable to come together due to societal pressures. The two characters pass through moments of light and darkness and can come together only as shadows.

INDIAN PARALLEL CINEMA

The Indian Parallel Cinema movement was initially led by Bengali directors such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen, but some maintain that mainstream directors such as Guru Dutt, V. Shantaram, and Bimol Roy are also part of this movement, since their works challenged mainstream cinema conventions. For instance, Bimol Roy's Hindi film *Do Bigah Zameen* (*Two Acres of Land* [1953]), based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel about the 1943 Bengal famine, was heavily influenced by Italian neo-realism. It was also a huge mainstream hit. However, the most influential figure of Indian Parallel cinema was Satyajit Ray, whose films are generally classified as realist art cinema. Ray was influenced by Western directors such as Jean Renoir and De Sica whose *Bicycle Thief* (1949) inspired Ray's *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Road* [1955]), a path-breaking Indian film that won international acclaim. Kabir observes that Ray's *Pather Panchali* also influenced Fateh Lohani's Bengali film *Asia* (1960),

made in East Pakistan, contemporary Bangladesh (Kabir 1969: 33–42). However, Ray's later film *Charulata* (1964), which is more experimental in form and more subversive of societal norms than his earlier works, is one of the best examples of modernist cinema's influence on Ray. *Charulata*, based on Tagore's novella *Nashtanir* (*The Broken Nest* [1901]) is set in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century when the Bengal Renaissance was at its peak. The story revolves around the boredom of the lonely Charu/Charulata, wife of the westernized Bhupati, the wealthy publisher of the English-language paper *The Sentinel*, which leaves him no time for his wife. Bhupati's concern for his wife's loneliness makes him invite his cousin Amal to cultivate Charu's literary and artistic interests. Charu and Amal are attracted to each other, but Amal suddenly leaves one night, since he lacks the courage to reciprocate her feelings. The film is about Charu's discovery of herself within the rigid confines of the home. In *Charulata*, as in Ray's *The Home and the World* (1984), based on Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916), Ray addresses the split of the female character between the domestic interior space and the inaccessible public world outside.

Ray's innovative style complements the unconventional subject matter. The self-reflexive camera work of its opening scene makes the spectators aware that they are watching a film, distancing them from the characters. A key moment comes when Charu uses opera glasses to look outside, emphasizing her distance from the outside world. She is split even within the 'living space of the house which is divided between Bhupati's workspace and that of the library and recreation, a division between politics and culture' (Vasudevan 2011: 185). Set in the British colonial period, the film describes the paradoxes of a divided culture, which is neither British nor Indian, where the 'old stabilities and certainties [...] collapse, the watchdogs of a conservative society that consist of truth, honesty, the work ethic, and fidelity of marriage are thrown into jeopardy' (Ganguly 2007: 57).

MODERNISM AND SRI LANKAN CINEMA

Sri Lankan cinema has been highly influenced by Indian cinema, both by Hindi/Urdu films, and South Indian Tamil cinema. Therefore, early Sri Lankan directors faced the challenge of indigenizing not only Western cinema, but also Indian cinema. Sirisena Wimalaweera, who made the indigenous Sinhalese film *Amma* (*Mother* [1949]), has been compared to Dadasaheb Phalke, the father of Indian cinema, but in 'Phalke's case, the point of antagonism was Western culture while in Wimalaweera's case it was South Indian culture' (Dissanayake and Ratnavibhushana 2000: 9). However, Sri Lankan cinema continued to be heavily influenced by Hindi and Tamil melodramas until Lester James Peries, a director influenced by Italian neo-realism, made *Rekava* (*Line of Destiny* [1956]), which represented a 'decisive rejection of the existing genre of filmmaking in Sri Lanka' (13). His path-breaking film *Gamperaliya* (*The Changing Village* [1965]) is based on the Sri Lankan writer Martin Wikramasinghe's modernist novel with the same name; it deals with the collapse of the feudal social order and the emergence of the middle class unleashed by the forces of modernity (18).

Wimal Dissanayake and Ashley Ratnavibhushana observe that in contrast to Peries, Dharmasena Pathiraja reshaped Sinhalese cinema using techniques of distancing that ruptured the ruling mechanisms of audiences' identification with the characters on screen (2000: 36). The narrative style and dramaturgy of Pathiraja's

film *Para Dige* (*Along the Road* [1980]), which deals with urbanization and capitalist exploitation, has parallels with the epic theatre of Piscator and Brecht, since he attempts to create a distancing effect between the audiences and the characters (38–9). Modernist influences are also visible in the works of Vasantha Obeyesekera, whose film *Palangatiyo* (*Grasshoppers* [1979]) creates a disjunction between ‘images and the soundtrack’ since they do not ‘complement [...] but mutually interrogate one another’ (46).

To conclude, there are several other directors, from both mainstream and Parallel Cinema, who were influenced by modernism in the second half of the twentieth century, so no clear line can be drawn between the end of the period of modernist cinema and the beginning of postmodernist cinema in India or South Asia in general. Nonetheless, Indian cinema, which has influenced South Asian cinema, changed dramatically with the privatization of the industry from the 1990s on, leading to the entertainment industry called ‘Bollywood’. ‘Bollywood’, a product of globalization, caters both to South Asian and international audiences, particularly to the Indian diaspora. However, the pressures of global economic forces keep ‘Bollywood’ films from being as experimental or subversive as some of the modernist films discussed here. Naturally, modernist influences are not totally absent from ‘Bollywood’, but modernism is no longer dominant.

NOTES

1. I have translated the lyrics, since the film version that I used is not subtitled.
2. I have translated the lyrics, since the film version that I used is not subtitled.
3. I have translated the lyrics to convey the meaning of the words as accurately as possible.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

DANCE IN SOUTH ASIA



Ketu H. Katrak

‘A pioneer of modern dance in India.’

(Sangeet Natak Akademi’s citation for the Award for Creative Dance,
awarded to Astad Deboo, 1995)

The number one problem of modern social science has been modernity itself. By *modernity* I mean that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality), and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution).

(Taylor 2002: 91)

Modernization involves the transformation of an entire way of life, with or without a population’s consent. As Charles Taylor notes above, modernity involves new forms of social living that emphasize the individual versus community, new communications technologies, and new modes of social and economic organization. Such dramatic changes profoundly affect the arts. However, as Taylor adds,

we need to speak of *multiple* modernities, the plural reflecting the fact that non-Western cultures have modernized in their own ways and cannot be properly understood if we try to grasp them in a general theory that was originally designed with the Western case in mind.

(Taylor 2002: 91)

Such ‘multiple modernities’ are significant in analyzing dance in South Asia.

In this essay, I redefine the parameters of modernism as relevant for dance in South Asia. Modern initiatives in dance make changes (1) in the form of a dance style (such as the Indian classical style of Bharatanatyam, which can be transformed by including modern dance movements); (2) in collaging two or more dance styles together (such as Kathak, modern dance, and Odissi); (3) in choreographing new themes from

current social issues such as gender and ethnic identity, poverty, and the environment; or (4) in using voice, silence, story-telling, and theatre techniques with movement, creating hybrid dance-cum-theatre works.

A chronological trajectory for analyzing dance in South Asia is useful: the ‘modern’ generally spans the period from early twentieth century (revival of classical Indian dance styles) until the 1960s and 1970s. Next, the ‘contemporary’ period in the arts extends commonly from the 1980s with globalization and technological advances. Moving into the twenty-first century, artistic practices from pre-modern, modern, and contemporary times continue along with growing use of computer technology, innovative lighting, theatre, and multimedia tools. Modern dance in South Asia is a palimpsest of old and new, traditional and contemporary.

The geopolitical territory named South Asia (demarcated by superpowers vying for political allegiances after the Second World War), includes India (the largest landmass) along with Pakistan, Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), Nepal, and Bhutan. Since the modernizing of dance is more prevalent in India than in other South Asian nations, I will discuss Indian dance more extensively, although the pre-modern period, prior to the nearly 200 years of British colonization (ending in 1947), encompasses all of South Asia.

In analyzing when modernism began in South Asia, what traditions it rejected or incorporated, it is necessary to remember that there was more than one period of modernization in the region. Different genres of art – visual, architectural, numismatic, engraving, ancient Sanskrit drama, folk dance – evolved at their own pace without outside interventions. Modernization as understood today (industrialization, new communication methods), however, was introduced and imposed by British colonizers; once colonization took root, pre-modern South Asian societies could not evolve over time and arrive at alternative modernities best suited to their cultures. Additionally, British attitudes of superiority denigrated local customs as backward, leading to ironic pressures on local people in the nineteenth century to prove that their indigenous traditions, such as classical Indian dance, were also ‘modern’ in terms defined and understood by Westerners.

Further, the British modernized South Asia selectively and for the benefit of the colonial administration. At times, the results were beneficial, at others, destructive or somewhere in between. The English school system, as imposed on India under Macaulay in the 1850s, aimed primarily to train native functionaries for colonialist administration, but simultaneously created an educated class who could – and eventually did – use their knowledge to overthrow British rule. British-built railways both facilitated colonial rule and benefitted local people by expediting the transport of people and goods. Conversely, the introduction of cheap factory-made clothing from England into the Indian market destroyed local *swadeshi* (hand-woven, indigenous cloth) endeavours. Such modernizing moves also played havoc with long-standing traditions and customs, at once destabilizing many aspects of Indian society and leaving intact other horrible practices. For example, the British did not challenge such traditions as *sati* (widow-immolation) in deference to Brahmins, and in fact took many years to pass legislation banning *sati*, though they were quick to outlaw other practices that interfered with economic and political modernization. The resulting unevenness of British modernization in India – beneficial, detrimental, and at times both at once – was all too often viewed by the

colonizers as an unmitigated good despite its profoundly selective and self-serving implementation.

In the performing arts, the British stigmatized the tradition of *devadasis* (servants of god) who danced within the temple and who were ‘married to the temple deity’. *Devadasis* in Southern India (whose *sadir* dance became Bharatanatyam), as *tawaifs* (courtesans) in North India (whose *nautch* dance was revived as Kathak), preserved dance and music traditions (See Kothari 1989; Chakravorty 2008). Wealthy patrons who also expected sexual services supported these art connoisseurs. The contested histories of reviving Bharatanatyam and Kathak are significant since these classical styles inspire modernizing idioms unfolding at the intersection of classical and modern.

Social reformers countered colonizers’ ignorance by demonstrating a different form of Indian modernity rooted in ancient, even timeless Indian culture, distinct from Western modernity. This endeavour to invent, even ‘culturally engineer’ an Indian past within which classical Indian dance belonged was a complex process undertaken by Brahmins and educated elites; effectively, they marginalized *sadir*’s actual community of practitioners (see Coorlawala 1996; Allen 1997; O’Shea 2007, and 1998). In their excellent revisionary history, Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Daves Soneji remark that ‘the genealogy of the classical in modernity and its location in the spiritualized inner realm of the indigenous suggest why upper-caste elites and middle-class nationalists became the chief engineers of the classicization of indigenous dance and music in both northern and southern India,’ thereby proving its unique modernity to the colonists (Peterson and Soneji 2008: 6).

One key player in Bharatanatyam’s revival was Rukmini Devi Arundale, who institutionalized it by establishing the Kalakshetra Dance Academy in 1936 (see Meduri 2005; Samson 2010). Born into the Brahmin caste, she broke tradition at the age of 16 to marry George Arundale of the Theosophical Society in Madras. This marriage enabled Devi to travel extensively and view different artistic traditions. The famed Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova inspired her to study ballet, though Pavlova was also instrumental in persuading Devi to explore her own Indian dance traditions – an encouragement that led Devi to study *sadir* with *devadasi* Mylapore Gowri Amma and to be involved in its ‘revival’.

Although Devi asserted Bharatanatyam’s traditionalist base, she modernized dance presentation via modern stagecraft and lighting that rendered the dance theatrical. Simultaneously, Devi worked against modernizing the style in asserting its spirituality, claiming to ‘purify’ *sadir*, replacing sensuality with religiosity. This approach dismissed *devadasi* practice that embraced the sensual, sexual, and spiritual as integrally related. The legendary *devadasi* T. Balasaraswati strongly objected to Devi’s ‘Brahminized’ dance, describing it as ‘vulgar’ (T. Balasaraswati 1988: 38). Nationalist fervour influenced Devi and the Theosophical Society’s role in reviving the dance with ‘almost “religious” idealisation’ that was itself, according to Amit Srinivasan, ‘an effect of westernisation’ (Srinivasan 1985: 1874).

In the 1920s and 1930s, American dancer Ruth St Denis inspired the reformer Madame Menaka to transform the North Indian dance style, *nautch*, which had fallen into disrepute, into ‘a modern aesthetic expression,’ namely Kathak. Like Devi, Menaka also introduced modern stagecraft and created new dance-dramas relying on Hindu myths. Uttara Asha Coorlawala notes that St Denis’ initial inquiries about

nautch dancers were met by ‘silence’ and ‘embarrassment’, since *nautch* was considered debased. Nonetheless, St Denis met Bachwa Jan, a famous *nautch* dancer. The rest is history as St Denis and Ted Shawn created many dances with the Denishawn Company, such as *Nautch Dancer* (1932) and *Radha* (1906) (see Coorlawala 1992: 29; Desmond 1991; Srinivasan 2011 and 2007).

As the sun was setting on the British Empire, India and Pakistan were divided into two nations in the bloody 1947 Partition. The British-drawn national boundaries – created without regard for separating peoples of the same ethnicity, language, and religion – continue to be problematic even today. Since independence, India and Pakistan have fought two wars, and to this day, each rival, now with nuclear weapons, views the other with suspicion. In Islamic Pakistan today, the arts are not encouraged though they persist in the margins. Political suspicion accompanies anathema to Indian dance styles – Bharatanatyam is shunned since it translates as ‘dance of India’, and is associated with Hinduism. However, classical Indian dances influence its neighbours to the East, in Bangladesh and to the South in Sri Lanka.

To de-centre the dominance of India in any discussion of South Asia, I will discuss dance in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, before returning to India. The climate for dance in public in Pakistan’s Islamic State is restricted. Since 1947, Pakistan’s mostly military governments follow conservative, even fundamentalist interpretations of Islam that do not foster dance or creative experimentation.

Prior to Partition, prominent dancer Indu Mitha trained in the Uday Shankar style (discussed below) with Zohra and Kameshwan Sehgal in Lahore. Mitha visited India to study Bharatanatyam in Delhi and Chennai with Lalita Shashtri, returning to Pakistan after her marriage. She continued to teach Bharatanatyam even during General Zia’s repressive regime (1978–88), when dance performances were relegated to private homes. Mitha adapted her signature Bharatanatyam style to include Urdu songs attuned to Pakistani cultural identity, although there is no distinct modernizing of the form. Modern influences come from Pakistanis who have moved abroad, such as Mitha’s daughter and disciple, Tehreema Mitha, who moved in 1997 to the United States. In the landmark First National Dance Festival (1995), Tehreema Mitha, along with Sheema Kirmani (Odissi) and Nighat Choudhry (Kathak), returned from abroad to present innovative, modern choreography that challenged women’s domination in their homeland’s Islamic, patriarchal society.

In Bangladesh (independent since 1971), although predominantly Muslim, the climate for the arts is more liberal than in Pakistan. Bangladesh is receptive to classical Indian dance along with modernizing the styles. A modern innovation of Rabindranath Tagore’s dance-drama, *Tasher Desh* is noteworthy as a transnational collaboration between Bangladeshi dancer Warda Rihab specializing in Manipuri and the United Kingdom’s Rachel Krische.

In Sri Lanka, modernizing dance includes the use of traditional forms and modern dance as in Mohan Sudusinghe’s Meranga Dancing Company. Another artist, Nilan Maligaspe of Arpeggio Creative Dancing Academy, teaches creative dance (a phrase also used for Uday Shankar’s innovations in Modern Indian dance), ballet, and modern dance to underprivileged children.

Uday Shankar in the early twentieth century is recognized as the first pioneer of Modern Indian Dance, and the first to bring Indian classical dance to the West. Shankar’s ‘Creative Dance’ combined Indian dance with new movements and

storytelling, searching for a dance language that would communicate Indianness to varied audiences. Recent scholars, challenging earlier dismissal of such efforts as ‘orientalist’, have reassessed Shankar’s contributions; scholar Joan Erdman calls him ‘India’s first modern dancer. [Further,] Shankar’s translations for the West become both a success in their own time and a significant reference for contemporary attempts in modern and ethnic dance production’ (Erdman 1987: 84).

Once again, Pavlova enters Indian dance history – Shankar toured with her and choreographed two pieces, though he received no recognition from local reviews. Pavlova advised him (as she encouraged Devi) to return to India and explore his own traditions. Shankar did so in 1938, establishing his Culture Centre in Almora where students studied Indian classical movement (not entire items), music, improvisation, and fine arts. Shankar’s goal was the body’s free exploration unrestricted by classical styles’ rules, hence traditionalists criticized his appropriation of classical vocabulary. Another of Shankar’s key modernizing contributions was in works like *Labour and Machinery* (1936), critiquing the increasing mechanization of life. Such choreography about current themes is a mode used by contemporary South Asian artists.

In India, modernizing of dance forms is rooted in the rich tradition of the classical styles. The eight classical dance styles recognized by the Indian Government’s major arts organization, Sangeet Natak Akademi, are Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam (from Southern India), Kathak (from the North), Odissi, Manipuri, and Sattriya (from the East). Bharatanatyam and Kathak are used most commonly with modern dance techniques (the use of the floor) and abstract movement (non-narrative content) in new, multi-layered choreography. However, curiously, the key characteristic of modern Indian dance, even when influenced by modern dance, is its persistent *Indianness* – not as narrow or monolithic, but multifaceted and varied regionally, with different languages, musical, folk, and martial arts traditions. Along with modern dance influences, Indianness is visible in costume, sound, affect, and expression of *navarasas* (nine primary human emotions – love, anger, fear, disgust, compassion, valour, laughter, sorrow, and peace) – first discussed in the ancient Indian treatise of drama, dance, and dramaturgy, *The Natyasastra* (2nd–5th century BCE). The *navarasas* appear, for instance, in pioneer Astad Deboo’s creative modernizing of Indian dance, where he uniquely uses modern dance techniques such as non-narrative abstract dance communicated not via the impassive face common in Western modern dance, but with profound emotion rooted in the Indian aesthetic tradition of the *rasas* – Deboo’s signature modern Indian dance.

Deboo’s nearly 40-year career includes his early innovations in the 1960s and 1970s, combining Kathak with modern dances that were not welcomed at that time by Indians who saw it as ‘too Western’ (i.e. influenced by modern dance), and by Westerners who judged it as ‘not Indian enough’ (i.e. not classical Indian dance). In the mid-1960s in Bombay, Astad saw a performance by American modern dancer and choreographer Murray Louis and was deeply affected by the ‘attention to physicality’ (Deboo 2003). Deboo travelled extensively around the world in the 1960s on his own initiative – observing, learning and eventually creating his own signature style. During the 1960s, ironically, Indians embraced innovations in theatre, visual arts, music, and literature – all art forms except classical dance, partly because of its connection to the sacred. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, Deboo’s creative pursuits combining Indian movement with modern dance received lukewarm

reception in India; although outside India, at that time, imitating the West and embracing modern dance were all the rage.

Not until the 1990s did Indian audiences grow receptive to Indian dancers' combining traditional with new, modern idioms of movement, partly influenced by the internet and globalization. My focus here is on mostly modern forms that are based in classical Indian and other dance vocabularies such as modern dance. I am not dealing here with folk forms such as *bhangra* (originally from the Punjab in North India) or with the popular Bollywood style dancing in movies that have proliferated across the world with the influence of globalization. In 1995, India's Sangeet Natak Akademi recognized Deboo as 'a pioneer of modern dance in India', conferring on him the Award for Creative Dance. In 2007, he received the Padma Shri, one of the highest honours given by the Indian government to artists, also recognizing him as a pioneer of contemporary Indian Dance. Indeed, Deboo's artistic career has made key contributions both to the early modernizing and, more recently, the contemporizing of Indian dance. Today, Deboo, who is in his sixties, remains a vibrant performer, respected as an elder statesman of Indian modern and contemporary dance, and a mentor and inspiration for young artists.

Deboo's stunning signature style, characterized by minimalism and technical virtuosity, draws integrally from modern dance that emphasizes the body along with conveying movement with expressive *rasa*. His modernizing of Indian dance includes collaborative initiatives such as with Manipuri *thang-ta* (martial arts) and *pung cholam* (drum dancers). Deboo integrates classical Indian and modern dance in his 20-year creative choreography with the deaf, as with Chennai's Clarke School for the



Figure 12.1 Astad Deboo with the Pung Cholam drummers of Manipur in *Rhythm Divine*.
Photographer: Farrokh Chothia.



Figure 12.2 Deboo's choreography in *Breaking Boundaries*.
Photographer: Haran Kumar.

Deaf, for whom he created *Contraposition* (2005), which uses Bharatanatyam and modern dance along with danced representations of the *rasas* of fear, disgust, and compassion. Deboo's work with street children of the Salaam Baalak Trust (established by filmmaker Mira Nair after *Salaam Bombay!*'s success in 1988) in *Breaking Boundaries* (2010) uses modern dance techniques that emphasize the dancers' bodies in difficult balancing poses, incorporating a global soundscape with classical piano and opera music – all profoundly challenging to these disadvantaged youth exposed only to Bollywood music and dance.

Another icon in innovating Indian dance was the wholly original artist Chandralekha (also known as Chandra). Chandra, like Deboo, used abstract movement (less common in the 1970s than today) to evoke *rasa*, demonstrating that emotional responses were not confined to narrative dance – part of her legacy for future Indian dancers. Chandra trained initially in Bharatanatyam, but rejected its superficial religiosity, over-ornamentation, and reliance on epic stories and myths.

Although, like modern dancers, Chandra embraced the human body in her various works, beginning with *Angika* (1985) and ending with *Sharira* (2001) (both translate as the 'body'), her vision was grounded firmly in Rustom Bharucha's words, 'the Indian psychophysical tradition', including martial arts, such as Kerala's *kalaripayattu* (Bharucha 1995). Chandra never claimed that she was doing anything new or modern. Nevertheless, she was a risk-taker and gives new meaning to truly working 'on the edge'.

Chandra leaves a lasting legacy as a pioneering foremother for artists in India and the diaspora, using abstract movement with *rasa* and reverberating in Bharatanatyam dancers Anita Ratnam (Chennai-based) and Hari Krishnan, artistic director of InDance, a multi-ethnic, Toronto-based dance company. Ratnam and Krishnan collaborate transnationally between Chennai and Toronto, both deploying modern dance with *rasa* and transforming Bharatanatyam from within. They re-interpret India's epic figures in contemporary choreography, as in Ratnam's *A Million Sita-s* (2011) and Krishnan's *Owning Shadows* (2009) based on the demoness figure Surpanakha in the epic, *The Ramayana*. Ratnam and Krishnan delve, via abstract movement, into the human emotions of love, lust, and greed.

Chandra's legacy is also alive in Los Angeles-based Shyamala Moorthy who works with the Post Natyam Collective (with members in Los Angeles, Kansas, and Germany) to create 'long-distance choreography' via the internet (Katrak 2011). Moorthy's solo, entitled *Sensitize*, represents female desire and pleasure via movement and *mudras* (from classical Bharatanatyam), reminiscent of Deboo's and Chandra's use of abstract movement infused with *rasa*. Among other Indian-descended diaspora artists, Los Angeles-based Sheetal Gandhi and New York-based Parijat Desai embrace a vibrant post-modernity that breaks down the body lines even further than in modern dance; their jagged choreography works against linear meaning-making.

Movement-based groups that encourage innovative modern work along with national and international collaboration, workshops, and mentoring young artists in India include New Delhi-based Gati Dance Forum (www.gatidance.com) since 2007 and Bangalore-based Attakalari: Center for Movement Arts since 1992 that also offers a Diploma in Movement Arts and Mixed Media (www.attakalari.org).

Among other Indian performing artists using elements of modern dance in their work is Madhu Nataraj, trained in Kathak by her mother Maya Rao and in Contemporary Dance in New York. Nataraj is artistic director of Bangalore-based Natya STEM (Space, Time, Energy, Movement) Dance Kampni (since 1995), which is recognized as one of India's leading contemporary dance companies, showcasing how tradition and modernity co-exist (www.stemdancekampni.in). Chennai-based Padmini Chettur, trained in Bharatanatyam, danced from 1991–2001 in Chandra's works, then formed her own company, creating works with impeccable bodily rigour and virtuosity. Unlike Chandra, Deboo, or Ratnam, Chettur elects to wear black leotards and tights and not evoke Indian idioms in her presentation.

Thus far, I have analyzed modern dance techniques influencing the *form* of Indian dance. Modernity is as importantly expressed via dance and theatre representations of *modern themes* concerning women and the poor by Ahmedabad-based Bharatanatyam dancer Mallika Sarabhai. She creates modern, feminist works against gender discrimination (as did her mother Mrinalini Sarabhai earlier in critiquing dowry-related deaths in dance) by drawing upon female icons such as Sita (from *The Ramayana*) and Draupadi (Sarabhai played Draupadi in Peter Brooks' version of *Mahabharata* in 1985). Her one-woman dance-theatre work *Sita's Daughters* (with over 500 shows) valorizes women who question rather than acquiesce to males in their lives.

Anita Ratnam, founder/director of Arangham Trust and Dance Company (since 1992), retains, like Chandralekha, an Indian aesthetic affect in her choreography along with modern dance movements. Ratnam's wholly modern take on traditional

goddess traditions and parallel mythologies from India, Tibet, China, and Egypt lies behind her non-linear, non-narrative choreography that uses abstract movement with *rasa* in works such as *7 Graces* (2005) (that adapts the Tibetan goddess Tara's qualities). *7 Graces* is co-choreographed with Hari Krishnan who also directed it.

Ratnam created a key modern tool that has become indispensable for anyone interested in Indian dance worldwide – a web portal for Indian dance, www.narthaki.com (since April 2000), which includes reviews, interviews, announcements, and interactive segments. Ratnam is renowned as a visionary curator of cutting-edge Indian performing arts events and for her pioneering co-production of *The Other Festival* (1998–2006) (www.theotherfestival.com) that provided a platform for experimental dance.

British-Indian Bharatanatyam-trained Shobana Jeyasingh uses modern and contemporary dance most skillfully in her choreography, as does British-Bangladeshi Akram Khan, trained in Kathak and contemporary dance. Recently, Khan performed *Desh* (*Homeland* [2011]) in Bangladesh, his parents' home. *Desh* evokes immigrant dilemmas of cultural identity and belonging (www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk and www.akramkhancompany.net).

In conclusion, the legacy of distinctive South Asian modern dance continues to evolve. Today, artists create choreography regionally and transnationally, reinventing their rich dance traditions along with openness to global dance influences in vibrant new work.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MODERNISM AND ITS FOUR PHASES

Literature in South Asia

—♦—
Vinay Dharwadker

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

When South Asia is identified as a literary region in the post-colonial period, it is equated, in effect, with the ensemble of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, even though its geopolitical definition also includes Bhutan and the Maldives. The region coincides broadly with what British colonial discourse designated as the Indian subcontinent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its natural boundaries have set it apart as a self-enclosed natural environment since prehistoric times, and have rendered it a unique, circumscribed cultural zone since about 1500 BCE, separating it from, say, the cultural zones of China (formed earlier) and Islam (fashioned much later). The subcontinent's basic geo-cultural features, together with its social, political, and economic history, have shaped its literature for more than two and a half millennia, and contextual factors such as language, literacy, colonialism, social change, and industrialization remain dominant in the modern period. On this canvas, South Asian modernism presents us with two principal analytical challenges: we cannot assume that its specific history will fit into a pre-existing chronological model based on modernisms elsewhere, and we cannot expect its narrative to be both linear and homogenous for the region as a whole.

There are four main reasons for this conceptual turbulence. First, South Asia evolves in the Common Era as a dense, irreparably fragmented *multilingual* region – in fact, the most multilingual among regions of comparable size on the planet, with nearly 105 languages of primary and secondary importance today, which are differentiated into about 3,000 dialects and speech varieties (Ramanujan 1991: xiv-xvi). Second, this multilingualism is unique because, unlike other parts of the world, South Asia invents its own scripts by the third century BCE. Before the middle of the second millennium CE, these scripts develop into a dozen distinct, fully fledged writing systems, which create a *multi-literate* culture that not only covers the stretch from Pakistan to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, but also spreads across much of Southeast Asia, from Indonesia to Thailand and Cambodia. The most material consequence of this multi-literacy is that, in the early nineteenth century, when the first print sphere

of non-Western languages emerges outside Europe – in British India – its formation centres on the standardization and design, casting and punching, and marketing and dissemination of moveable metal type for some 45 languages in South and Southeast Asia (Dharwadker 1997: 111). This widespread, interactive web of multiple languages and multiple writing systems in the medium of print provides the prime material context in which modernist textual practices take shape in South Asia over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The third reason for conceptual reorientation is that the major modern South Asian languages possess large and well-preserved literatures of their own, some of them dating back to the first millennium CE. Tamil literature, for example, acquires its own classical trajectory by CE 300, independent of Sanskrit; the Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi canons are at least 1,000 years old; and even Punjabi writing, with its relatively recent script (Gurmukhi), starts in the early sixteenth century (Pollock 2003). During Akbar's reign (1556–1605), the Mughal state and its cultural syncretism begin to accommodate and patronize this network of interacting literatures on a large scale. When the East India Company starts formally to colonize the subcontinent around 1757, and Lord Cornwallis establishes Fort William College in 1800, the need for officials to understand the colony's multiple literatures in their multilingual and multi-literate environment becomes central to British policy (Wolpert 1993). European colonialism's confrontation in India – with the textual dimension of a civilization with a long precolonial past, and living literatures that adapt rapidly to Portuguese, French, and English – stands in contrast to its confrontation with cultures with other patterns of literacy outside the West.

The fourth reason for uncertainty is that, no matter how we historicize particular movements, genres, and artworks in South Asia, modernism in recognizable forms appears first during the colonial period. But this does not mean that Europeans import and transplant modernism in ready-made varieties on the subcontinent, as the label of 'colonial modernity' seems to imply – modernism's actual history in the region demonstrates that its origins and developments lie much more in the artistic autonomy and inventiveness of colonial subjects than is usually assumed (Dharwadker 2003). The implication is that, even though most South Asian modernisms begin under broadly shared colonial conditions in and around British India, and hence can be fitted into a common historical narrative for that period, the story breaks up radically after Partition and decolonization in 1947–8 into divergent new national narratives for Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (and, after 1971, for Bangladesh).

Thus, the task of charting the evolution of modernism in South Asian literature from the colonial to the post-colonial period shifts from a framework of continuity to one of ruptures and dispersions in unpredictable directions, both modified in retrospect by the precolonial divergences of multilingualism, multi-literacy, and multiple literatures. To point to just one set of differences in the post-colonial conditions under which the new-national modernisms find their trajectories: Pakistan turns into an Islamic republic under several military dictatorships; Bangladesh breaks away to become an unstable Muslim-majority people's republic; Nepal defines itself as a Hindu monarchy with a parliament; Sri Lanka constitutes itself as a socialist nation-state under atheistic Buddhist dominance; and India manages its immense diversity as a secular, affirmative-action, multi-party constitutional democracy.

LITERARY MODERNISM: PHASES AND ORIGINS

Given such a background, any periodization of South Asian literary modernism has to begin by acknowledging that the first distinctly modernist works appear in the subcontinental languages in the early and mid-1880s, a few years before Rubén Darío, for example, coins the term *modernismo* for a new poetics in Latin America (Calinescu 1987: 69–72). Literary modernism unfolds thereafter in four phases across British India (territories ruled directly by the Raj) and various subordinated states (ruled by Indian princes until 1947–50), and subsequently across new post-colonial nation-states. As a first step, these historical segments may be differentiated using approximate dates: the inaugural phase, from 1882 to 1922; the second, from 1922 to 1947 or 1950; the third, from about 1950 to 1980; and the fourth, from 1980 to the present. To explicate this chronology, it is useful to analyze modernism's precedents within South Asia, before characterizing the phases in detail.

From a literary standpoint, the social dimension of the subcontinent's modernity – rather than its aesthetic dimension – provides the foundation for modernist innovation. In the course of its multimodal interactions with the subcontinent from the late sixteenth century onward, Britain accumulates an immense body of knowledge about the land, its flora and fauna and natural resources, and its people and their ways of life. After the colonization of Bengal and other parts, the British critique of Hindu society – of its beliefs, customs and rituals, superstitions, caste divisions, family and kinship codes, scriptures, laws, and literatures – triggers two types of responses from Indians. One is an extended counter-critique of Europe and its culture, which leads to adulation and emulation, at one extreme, and to rejection and retreat, at the other. The complementary response is an uncompromising self-critique among Indians, which acknowledges the validity of many European criticisms, and sets out to 'improve' indigenous society and institutions. After about 1815, following the visionary initiatives of Rammohun Roy, this development stimulates far-reaching movements of social reform across the subcontinent (Dharwadkar 2003: 219–22). The reformers focus, for example, on changing women's gendered roles in the family; establishing women's education; ending child-marriage; preventing the immolation of widows (*satis*), improving their treatment in society, and enabling them to remarry; and ending discrimination and violence in the caste system. Roy's followers play 'a crucial role in the genesis and development of every major religious, social, and political movement in India from 1820 to 1930' (Kopf 1979: xiii). They are 'the first Hindus to defy the taboo about crossing the seas to the West'; they become 'the first social reformers, [...] the pioneers of liberal political consciousness and Indian nationalism'; and, across generations, they introduce 'ethical and professional standards into Indian law, medicine, natural sciences, teaching, journalism, and civil administration' (xiii). Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this comprehensive programme of social reform becomes the indigenous origin and reference-point for every aesthetic modernism on the subcontinent, and gives a large proportion of its literature an overt reformist disposition. South Asian literary modernism thus begins in the early 1880s as an aesthetic outcome of a quest for social reform and self-modernization under colonialism, and not merely as an imitative offshoot of Euro-American *modernismo* or modernism.

FIRST PHASE: REALISM AND REFORM, 1880–1920

South Asia's first literary modernism stretches roughly from the early 1880s to the late 1910s, and is driven by the discourse of social reform and the invention of realism in the indigenous languages. Its metaphorical bookends are Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Ananda-matha* (*The Sacred Brotherhood*, 1882) and Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare-baire* (*Home and the World*, 1916), both experimental novels in Bengali. Besides Chatterjee and Tagore, innovators include Premchand (bilingual in Urdu and Hindi) and Mohammad Iqbal (Urdu); while Tagore also becomes a memorial figure in the reconstructed literary history of Bangladesh after 1971, Iqbal is identified as the founding poet and intellectual of Pakistan, and Premchand proves to be the inventor of modern fiction in Hindi (India) as well as Urdu (India and Pakistan). The primary concerns and accomplishments of these first-phase modernists, in their respective languages and on a subcontinental scale, are the establishment of anticolonial nationalism (Chatterjee), universal spiritual humanism (Tagore), secular 'idealist realism' (Premchand), and the reconciliation of religion, science, and modernity (Iqbal). Their imaginative geography influentially highlights the traditional Indian village, the countryside, and the country estate, with a secondary focus on colonial urban sites, such as Calcutta, Varanasi, and Lahore. Until the 1920s, they imagine the nation-yet-to-be as a historical as well as contemporaneous community, but their visions of nation and nationality diverge quite radically: Tagore represents the landed gentry, Premchand is pro-Gandhian and proto-socialist, while Iqbal, in part, practises Muslim modernist classicism. Even though Tagore and Iqbal are major poets in their respective languages, the first phase of modernism is dominated by the birth of the modern novel, novella, and short story and of realistic representation in Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu, as well as languages such as Oriya and Malayalam (Dharwadker 2012: 478–80).

Late in the first – and well into the second – phase of South Asian modernism, Premchand defines a unique paradigm for language and politics, aesthetics and ideology, in relation to past, present, and future literature as well as society. While Tagore and Iqbal centre their writing on the matrix of religion and spirituality (reformed Hinduism and modernist Islam, respectively), Premchand develops an explicitly secular-socialist orientation, which enables him to spearhead the massive Progressive movement that dominates South Asian arts for the next half-century. Unlike many subcontinental writers who view modernism as bourgeois self-indulgence and hence contrast it with socialism, Premchand fuses socialism and modernism, echoing precedents in the modernizing socialist tradition that runs from Marx and Engels to Trotsky and the Bauhaus movement. Three features of Premchand's modernism stand out: (1) his bilingualism, which leads him to produce separate Urdu and Hindi versions of many of his writings; (2) his invention of idealistic realism, which represents things simultaneously 'as they are' and 'as they ought to be'; and (3) his aesthetic and stylistic minimalism, which emphasizes plain expression without moral, philosophical, or political simplification. His singular achievement, partly like Tagore's, is to articulate a thick description and a thick critique of the destructive elements in India's agrarian society and conservative traditions, and to envision an inclusive urban-cosmopolitan modernity (Trivedi 2003: 1008–11; Puchner 2012: 311–14).

SECOND PHASE: NATIONALISM AND EXPERIMENTATION, 1922–47

The beginnings of the second phase of Indian literary modernism lie in converging political and aesthetic trajectories: the first subcontinent-wide *satyagraha* protest (nonviolent moral suasion) against British colonial rule, led by M.K. Gandhi in 1920; and the first European modernist art exhibition on Indian soil, a travelling Bauhaus show in Calcutta in December 1922 (Mitter 2007: 15). Whereas the literary constructions of the nation-yet-to-be in the first phase precede and foreshadow political nationalism (given form with the Indian National Congress, launched in 1885), the literary nationalism of the second phase follows after the rise of Gandhian anticolonial nationalism in the political sphere. The later careers of Tagore, Premchand, and Iqbal remain influential between about 1920 and 1947, but these decades are shaped predominantly by younger writers: among them, Jibanananda Das and Buddhadeva Bose (Bengali); Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao (Indian English); Nirala, Agneya, and G.M. Muktibodh (Hindi); B.S. Mardhekar, P. S. Rege, and Indira Sant (Marathi); and the early Amrita Pritam (Punjabi). Besides resurgent anticolonial nationalism, this generation engages with wide-ranging aesthetic and thematic experimentation, and its principal intellectual and cultural reference-points shift to Gandhi, Marx, Freud, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf (Dharwadker and Ramanujan 1994; Rushdie and West 1997).

More overtly than writers in the first phase, innovators of the second modernism fashion several notable movements: for instance, a post-Tagore avant-garde in Bengali around the magazine *Kallol* in Calcutta; *pragativad* or progressivism in Hindi and Urdu, a part of the subcontinent-wide Progressive movement; and *prayogavad* or experimentalism in Hindi and Marathi, which widely influenced the early post-colonial decades. For second-phase writers in the final years of colonial rule, the urgent new locations of literary engagement are the industrial city (spawned by colonial capital) and the subcontinent's own metropolitan centres (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras). They are increasingly concerned with massive migrations from village to city; with reconfigurations of both village and city in the mid twentieth century; with the impossibility of a return to rural environments; and especially with the interlinked phenomena of the 'abandoned' village, the 'village without walls', the village-as-nation, and the nation-as-village (spotlighted equally by Gandhian and socialist anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism). Between about 1920 and 1947, poetry becomes a fresh social force in most South Asian languages, and shares centre-stage with prose; and prose fiction itself is surrounded by new theoretical writings on literature, art, literary history, and poetics (Dharwadker and Ramanujan 1994: 186–93).

Among writers representative of the second phase, Mulk Raj Anand appears as a figure of distinction: he is the first novelist in Indian-English literature and an innovator of modernist realism of subcontinental significance. His inaugural novel, *Untouchable* (1935), maps its young protagonist's social and psychological reality in the course of a single day, which serves as a synecdoche of his entire life and circumstances. Minimalist in style and integrating Gandhian politics with socialism, it actively resists a religious interpretation of character and event, and adopts a pragmatic and realistic position on the material correlates of urban modernity and modernization. Though not intended so, *Untouchable* belongs to Premchand's genre

of idealist realism, and fully anticipates the intersection of secular aesthetics and progressive politics in the third phase of modernism.

THIRD PHASE: INDEPENDENCE AND NATION-BUILDING, 1950–80

Historically, the second phase ends with a series of irreversible transformations: the Partition of the mainland (creating India and West and East Pakistan), independence from British rule, and the formation of sovereign nations (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Ceylon, at that time). In India, the third phase of modernism undergoes successive inaugurations and realignments after Independence (1947), followed by the establishment of a republic (1950), followed in turn by a massive internal division into states along linguistic lines (1956 onward). The number and variety of important writers mushroom rapidly during the first three decades of post-colonialism, with the growth of a multilingual national public sphere under democracy, and the simultaneous expansion of a large number of public spheres in the indigenous languages ‘regionalized’ within the new nation. Among the early post-colonial modernists are fresh figures such as Mahasweta Devi and Badal Sircar (Bengali); Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Rajendra Yadav, Mannu Bhandari, Kamleshwar, and Yashpal (Hindi); Saadat Hasan Manto, Qurratulain Hyder, and Ismat Chughtai (Urdu); Vinda Karandikar and Vijay Tendulkar (Marathi); G.K. Adiga and Girish Karnad (Kannada); O.V. Vijayan (Malayalam); G.V. Desani, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekiel, and Adil Jussawalla (Indian English); and A.K. Ramanujan (bilingual; Kannada and English) and Arun Kolatkar (bilingual; English and Marathi) (Jussawalla 1974; Dharwadker and Ramanujan 1994; Rushdie and West 1997).

Innovators in the third Indian modernism engage especially with the ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus; with the related political and intellectual movements identified broadly as socialism, Nehruvian secularism, and existentialism; and with the multifarious process of nation-building. Most literary movements now emphasize the value of newness, under labels such as *nai kavita* and *nava kavya* (‘new poetry’), *nai kahani* (‘new short story’), and *naya upanyas* (‘new novel’), with claims of novelty frequently implying both experimentation and transgression. Following rapid disenchantment with the post-colonial nation-state and the existential post-colonial condition, some movements give way to anti-aestheticism, anti-poetry, and enraged protest literature – especially in emergent bodies of subaltern writing in multiple languages, which include Dalit literature, launched shortly after an initial mass conversion of some three million ‘untouchables’ from Hinduism to Buddhism under B.R. Ambedkar’s leadership in 1956–7. Many third-phase writers reorient themselves imaginatively with respect to India’s new linguistic states (as the nation’s grassroots building blocks), and to reconfigured rural, urban, and ‘middle’ India; many also realign themselves with regard to the old and new margins of the nation, ranging from city slums and Aboriginal reservations to borderlands and ‘badlands’. In literature, the most unexpected outcomes of redefinition are the appearance of drama and theatre as a social force, and of almost equal attention in the national public sphere to drama, poetry, novel, short story, and nonfictional prose.

On this crowded landscape, two examples may represent the vitality of modernist invention under postcolonial conditions. Saadat Hasan Manto begins his career as an Urdu short-story writer in British India, but moves reluctantly to Pakistan in 1948 to rejoin his fractured family; in the transition, he emerges as the premier literary ‘witness’ of the enormity, brutality, and ordinariness of the subcontinent’s Partition, which claims the lives of at least 1.5 million people and displaces about 14 million others (the largest forced migration in history). Manto integrates documentary realism with condensed allegory and black irony, so that his compact fictions constantly reinterpret concrete events on the plane of ideas, values, and moral judgments, and raise the lives of ordinary people to the level of their extraordinary implications for global history (Puchner 2012: 727–9).

Manto’s younger contemporary Mohan Rakesh, also from Punjab, develops into a prolific Hindi dramatist, fiction writer, diarist, translator, and theorist in an experimental postcolonial mode. His earliest full-length play, *Ashadh ka ek din* (*One Day in the Season of Rain*, 1958), defines a primary facet of experimentalism: as the first major success on the post-colonial stage and a theatrical standard for subsequent decades, it establishes modernist classicism as a viable form of cultural subversion. Rewriting the life and works of the classical Sanskrit author Kalidas against the grain of conventional historicism, Rakesh’s play deploys intertextuality, defamiliarization, and self-reflexive devices such as the *mise en abyme* to radically transform Indian understandings ‘not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’ in the post-colonial ‘here and now’ (Eliot 1969 [1920]: 49; Rakesh 2015).

FOURTH PHASE: DIASPORA AND COSMOPOLITANISM, 1980-PRESENT

In the Indian and South Asian imagination, the experience of the authoritarianism of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s Emergency regime (1975–7) coincides with a breakdown of literary-national boundaries. The publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) in England inaugurates the fourth modernism, which is defined by a global diaspora of South Asians and by transnational cosmopolitanism. Besides Rushdie, the new and experimental writers of this phase include such figures, in the Indian context, as Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri (Indian English); Nirmal Verma, Usha Priyamvada, Kamleshwar, Raghuvir Sahay, Kedarnath Singh, and Ulka Saraogi (Hindi); and Sunil Gangopdhyay (Bengali). For Pakistan, they include Hanif Kureishi and Bapsi Sidhwa; for Sri Lanka, Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, and Romesh Goonetilleke; for Nepal, Samrat Upadhyay; and for Bangladesh, Monica Ali (all English). While some of the novelistic fiction aligns itself with magical realism, some of it also reinvents social and psychological realism in unprecedented settings and contexts; and large portions of the new writing map out migration, subalternity, feminism, and ‘the global South’ (Rushdie and West 1997). With its practitioners scattered around the world, this phase re-empowers fiction and prose, leading to a recession of drama (as distinct from theatre) and a general eclipse of poetry.

Despite the diaspora’s international dominance, however, some paradigmatic writing of the fourth phase comes from writers such as Mahasweta Devi and Arun Kolatkar, who are situated on the subcontinent, and whose careers begin soon after

decolonization but reach an apogee only around the millennial moment. As a proponent of socialist modernism, Devi – a fiction writer, dramatist, anthropologist, and journalist in Bengali – expands literary representation into the domain of ethnographic realism. Her short story ‘Giribala’ (1982), for instance, documents the life of its female protagonist with the density of an ethnographic field report from contemporary rural Bengal, bringing her alive in the face of poverty, illiteracy, arranged marriage, domestic deception and abuse fuelled by alcohol and ganja, insurmountable debt, exploitation bordering on slavery, and the horrendous loss of children to human trafficking (Puchner 2012: 1147–65).

While Devi transforms the storyteller into a scrupulous anthropologist of her own society, Arun Kolatkar reinvents the poet as a postcolonial *flâneur*, an ironic inversion of Baudelaire’s Parisian dandy and loiterer. Kolatkar’s poetic oeuvre is uniquely bilingual, spanning more than 1,000 pages over 50 years, about two-thirds in Marathi and one-third in English. As his books crisscross through the ancient epic period, postclassical times, colonial history, and contemporaneity, he uses the historical imagination as his principal poetic means of mapping the postcolonial present in both languages. Nevertheless, Kolatkar’s text is fragmentary, ‘a heap of broken images’ assembled afresh into a surreal montage that unreels through incantation and narrative, visual drama and verbal exposition, lyrical tenderness and hard-boiled cynicism, even while insisting on its own concrete artefactuality (Eliot 1963 [1922]: 22). But as three of his final volumes show, his post-colonial ‘here and now’ are also simultaneously global and transhistorical. The twin Marathi and English versions of *Sarpa Satra* (2003, 2004) interweave genocide and environmental destruction in the ancient *Mahabharata* with the contemporary American destruction of Iraq and the renewed violence of Hindu fundamentalism. The Marathi-only *Bhijaki Vahi* (2003) reconfigures the condition of women and gender-relations today as the cumulative story of women over three millennia in Greek, Latin, classical Tamil, Arabic, Persian, Native American, and Russian classics, among others (Dharwadker 2014: 151–81). The English-only *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004) makes ‘garbage’ – human, animal, inanimate – its central trope, so that the iconic postcolonial city is literally a city of garbage built on islands joined by garbage as landfill, in which ‘the production and reproduction of garbage [...] is an infinite process’, and ‘the more you clean Bombay,/the more Bombay there is to clean’ (Dharwadker 2014: 179). At the same time, for these iconoclastic poems, ‘poverty [...] is the most fundamental problem confronting modernity and postcolonialism’, and Bombay – a microcosm of India, itself a microcosm of the world – is the ultimate ‘museum of poverty’, in which ‘living things as well as inanimate objects become the nightmarish objects on display for the *flâneur*’s flinching gaze’ (Dharwadker 2014: 179, 181). Between them, Kolatkar and Devi bring the phases of modernism full circle, without traversing the same historical ground twice: they revivify much of what is at the heart of early social modernism, but project it now onto the twenty-first century’s ‘unfinished project of modernity’ (Habermas 1997).

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MODERNISM IN SOUTH ASIAN ART MUSIC



Stanley Scott

This essay traces modernism in South Asian art music (raga-sangit) from its eighteenth century roots to the twenty-first century. The examples, drawn from Pakistan, North India, and Bangladesh, represent parallel developments throughout South Asia.

We must distinguish between modernization and modernism. *Modernization* – the effort to keep up with contemporary developments – is imitative, and in India is linked with westernization. *Modernism* calls for originality. Musical modernism, as a motivating aesthetic philosophy that regards change and innovation as core virtues, did not dominate South Asian art music as it did Western music near the turn of the twentieth century, for several reasons. The subject of popular (film) music is beyond the scope of this brief essay.

The first obstacle was the emphasis on improvisation in South Asian art music. Why modernize, the musician might ask, when every concert presents ‘new music’? A second obstacle was the difficulty of integrating Western influences into Indian classical practice. Western modernists drew on Eastern melodies, rhythms, and timbres to enrich their musical palette, but the harmonic structure of Western music made it difficult for Indian musicians to respond in kind. Indian classical melodies are not harmonically constructed, but emphasize microtonal variation, melodic ornaments, tonal hierarchies, and compositional forms that frequently conflict with the logic of Western harmonic practice. The application of harmony to Indian ragas would alter their melodic logic, thereby destroying their identity as ragas (melodic formulae).

A third obstacle was the link between melody and ethos in Indian music. Every raga must evoke aesthetic moods recognized by tradition. Western audiences sometimes reject music that defies conventional expectations, but in India such expectations are reinforced by the aesthetic sensibilities of the music’s creators. Western composers’ mission includes persuading performers to play in new idioms. Indian art music, in contrast, does not include a class of composers distinct from the performers themselves. Who then will lobby for the performance of new music that creates a space for ambivalence of meaning and emotion, or sets out to shock the audience?

In Western music, modernism seeks to transform the nature of works – objects of art that exist independently of their composers. In South Asian classical music, works are not separate from their creators, because each new performance bears the stamp of the improviser. Modernism in South Asia is therefore about creating new kinds of artists rather than new kinds of works. Indian musical modernism began with the appearance of new categories of musicians: Hindu disciples of Muslim ustads, amateur students of hereditary professionals, and middle-class women performing on a stage previously reserved for courtesans and temple dancers.

THE COLONIAL IMPRINT

The seeds of Indian modernism were sown in eighteenth-century Calcutta, with the emergence of the South Asian intelligentsia, consisting largely of Bengali Hindus, who served the British colonial establishment as cultural intermediaries. The Bengalis learned English and English ways, and the British learned Bengali, Hindi, Persian, and Sanskrit. British scholars found in Sanskrit a parallel to Latin: dead except as a liturgical language, but the key to unlocking a storehouse of ancient literature. The study of that literature gave birth to British orientalism and the discovery of India's 'golden age' (Kopf 1969: 2–5).

Orientalism gave India's nationalist movement an inspirational narrative that contrasted significantly with those of Europe's emerging republics. In Europe, nationalism and modernism were allies. The creation of democratic republics inspired European composers to incorporate elements from indigenous styles in an emerging musical language. In contrast, Indian nationalism celebrated the ancient, rather than the modern. The trope of the golden age allowed Hindu nationalists to find inspiration in an India that pre-dated both European colonization and Islamic rule. North Indian music, in particular, served sometimes as an icon of national identity, sometimes of revived Hindu hegemony, and sometimes of an Indo-Islamic synthesis.

Orientalism remained a cross-cultural collaboration as long as the British administration supported it. While Indian reformers sought to find common ground with the West and modernize indigenous society, British orientalists created Indian printing presses, published translations of European and Indian works, and promoted the study of Indian languages alongside English. This collaboration crumbled with the publication of James Mill's 1818 indictment of oriental civilizations in his *History of British India* (Kopf 1969: 236–7), the accession of the anti-orientalist Governor-General William Bentinck (1828), and the efforts of Thomas Babington Macaulay (Indian Supreme Council, 1834–8) to abolish the teaching of Indian languages in English institutions in India (241–52).

By the mid nineteenth century, British orientalism had been replaced by heavy-handed, top-down cultural reform. The Bengali intelligentsia became increasingly nationalistic; their knowledge of English, paired with the rehabilitation of India's identity as a great civilization with a classical age to rival those of the Greeks and Romans, provided them with the tools and motivation to begin the march towards independence.

In the arts, British efforts to reform indigenous society were most vigorous in the visual realm. The notions of 'high art' and the 'artist', which would have a telling influence on modern South Asian music, were introduced to India in the 1770s, with

the arrival of European artists who produced expensive works for the colonial elite. The 1850s saw the establishment of a nationwide system of government art schools, where Indians were instructed in Western visual techniques and groomed for a standard of respectability and income above that of the traditional artisan. Hereditary artisans were employed as ‘Company’ painters to produce picturesque representations of colonial Indian life (Guha-Thakurta 1992: 11–14).

In the early twentieth century, Indian visual artists would re-indigenize South Asian art by integrating Indian themes and aesthetic approaches into a Westernized medium. Indian musicians were spared the problem of ‘re-Indianizing’ their art, which had not been westernized. Colonial interest in South Asian music remained academic, perhaps because the English did not consume Indian music as they did Indian art (Guha-Thakurta 1992: 52).

The immunity of South Asian music from colonial meddling had its parallel in the division of Bengali households into public and private domains. Western art and objects belonged in the public rooms where men were entertained. Religious icons, produced by traditional artisans, belonged to the domain of ritual, inhabited by women and children, who did not frequent the public rooms (Guha-Thakurta 1992: 230). Although Indian music was performed in the outer sphere, it did not share the Western character of the art hanging on the walls; music lingered near the curtain that separated public and masculine from private and feminine.

SHIFTS IN PATRONAGE AND TRANSMISSION

Courtly musical patronage received a severe blow in 1856, when the British seized the throne of Lucknow from Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Wajid Ali had presided over the largest centre of musical patronage in North India, enticing many musicians away from the moribund Mughal court in Delhi (Kippen 1988: 6). A year later, the Mughal court was disbanded and the emperor exiled. Delhi’s musicians followed those of Lucknow to cities where employment might be found.

With the collapse of the courts, India’s middle class took up the mission of musical patronage. Music appreciation societies were formed, public concerts replaced aristocratic audiences, and amateur musicians became the students of Hindu pandits and Muslim ustads, who had formerly instructed only their intimate disciples, in stylistic lineages known as *gharanas*.

The *gharana* system provided significant advantages in transmitting a virtuosic oral tradition, but was ‘considered by both Western and Indian educationalists to be a milieu of music making that was the province of a degenerate, immoral, and illiterate class’ (Farrell 1997: 59). Reformers looked askance at the virtuoso singers and dancers known as courtesans, regarding them as prostitutes.

Internalizing the colonial critique, the Indian intelligentsia created new models of music education, focusing on a few core issues: the creation of a system of musical notation, the canonization of a ‘classical’ repertoire, the publication of that repertoire, the codification of a system of music theory, and the initiation of music schools – with an emphasis on transforming the role of women in music.

Early reformers included Bombay’s Students Scientific and Literary Society (SSLS), founded in 1848, and Bengal’s Ksetro Mohun Goswami and Sourindro Mohun Tagore (1840–1914). The SSLS published books of Indian music using staff notation,

and included music in the curriculum of its girls' schools (Bakhle 2005: 62–5). Goswami's 1869 publication *Sangitasara* featured his system of Bengali music notation. S.M. Tagore published widely on Indian music, and established music schools based on European models (Capwell 1991: 236–7).

Middle-class patronage accelerated in the 1870s, with the founding of music appreciation societies, notably Bombay's Parsi Gayan Uttejak Mandali and the Poona Gayan Samaj. These societies created music schools, held public concerts, and aimed to make music a respectable pursuit for women (Bakhle 2005: 75).

Many reformers held that 'Hindu music' had been divorced from its theoretical roots in the hands of Muslim musicians (Capwell 1991: 238). Although Muslims taught and performed for these societies, they were largely excluded as students and organizers (Bakhle 2005: 81). This was not the case, however, with Maula Baksh (1833–96), who founded his School of Indian Music under the auspices of the princely state of Baroda in 1886. Himself a Muslim and an enthusiastic syncretist, he incorporated North Indian, South Indian, and Western music into his curriculum. Embracing the use of musical notation, he brought music education into Baroda's girls' schools in 1887. Hundreds of boys and girls learned music in his schools in Baroda and Bombay (21–44).

Maula Baksh transformed musical life within the courtly tradition, imparting musical knowledge to many students from outside his family. But this effort at modernizing Indian music education from within the courts was among the last. Maula Baksh's effort to teach music to large numbers of children spoke of his determination to save Indian music from the extinction looming over the courts that patronized it. Muslim ustads, and singers from the courtesan tradition, would hold their own as performing artists on stage and in the recording and broadcast media, but in the realms of notation, canonization, publication, theoretical codification, and institutionalization, the Hindu gentry would dominate.

The project of modernizing North Indian music education reached its apex in the efforts of Pandits Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931). Primarily a theorist, Bhatkhande's approach was grounded in his knowledge of practical performance. He began from the premise that the practice of India's art music should be traceable to Sanskrit treatises dating at least to the thirteenth century CE. His close reading of ancient texts, however, revealed that only more recent treatises, dating from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, seemed relevant to the living performance tradition (Powers 1992: 11).

He combined his literary research with fieldwork, travelling throughout India in search of manuscripts and knowledgeable musicians. Bhatkhande's dismissal of the antiquity of 'Hindu music' was linked to his secularism. In his view, music did not need to be Hindu, or ancient, to be classical (Bakhle 2005: 108). It was a modern form, presently undergoing the process of classicization. His contributions to this process included his publication of *Kramik Pustak Malika* (KPM), a six-volume collection of 1,800 compositions, collected from many hereditary musicians. KPM transformed the musical property of gharana musicians into a universal canon (126). Bhatkhande also drew the disparate strands of raga grammar into a unified music theory, organized six national music conferences, and established several music schools.

Bhatkhande remains a paradoxical figure. Although gharana musicians were his sources for repertoire, he publicly decried them as 'illiterate, ignorant, and narrow-

mindful professionals' (Bhatkhande 1974: 34). His use of interviews, and interest in recording technology, evokes comparison with early ethnomusicologists, but his documented interview technique reveals a condescending manner that would make today's researchers cringe (Bakhle 2005: 111).

Vishnu Digambar Paluskar's modernism shared features with that of Bhatkhande: the publishing of traditional compositions, and the establishment of music schools. They also shared the view that Muslim musicians had severed the connection between music theory and performance, and both men sought to rehabilitate music by reuniting theory and practice.

The two reformers differed, however, in profound ways. Paluskar was a performer rather than a scholar, and had trained in the traditional manner, spending nine years as a residential disciple (Wade 1984: 40–3). Rejecting the life of a court musician, Paluskar gave some of India's earliest ticketed public concerts in 1897. He established his first music school, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in Lahore in 1901 (Bakhle 2005: 141–6).

Opening a larger Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in Bombay in 1908, Paluskar trained his disciples to perform and teach, and they established schools throughout the subcontinent. Unlike Bhatkhande, Paluskar made no pretense of secularism, unapologetically forging connections between music and worship. He endorsed the claim of an ancient root for contemporary music, which Bhatkhande had dismissed (Bakhle 2005: 155–6).

But although Bhatkhande's secularism and reliance on empirical evidence made him the more modern of these two educators, Paluskar's alliance with the nationalist movement, and his focus on training performers (rather than scholars), significantly amplified his influence. The establishment of India's recording and broadcast industries brought the voices of Paluskar's disciples into millions of Indian households.

Maula Baksh, Bhatkhande, and Paluskar were modernists in the realms of notation, publication, education, and patronage. To find a composer whose musical creations challenged both the limits of musical form and the definition of a musician, we will travel east, from Bombay to Bengal.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861–1941)

Rabindranath Tagore's international celebrity rests on his stature as the first Asian winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, but he is equally famous in South Asia for creating a massive oeuvre of more than 2,000 songs.

In Tagore, we find the emergence of Western notions of art and artist that were new to India. He was raised in a milieu that had steeped, for two generations, in an admixture of indigenous and Western cultural patterns. His grandfather Dwarkanath (1794–1846) was the first Indian member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, supported reform and modernization across a broad range of fields, and travelled widely. In France, Dwarkanath sang Italian and French songs to the piano accompaniment of the young Sanskritist Max Müller (Kripalani 1980: 17–21).

The tensions between nationalism and westernization emerge clearly in Rabindranath's relationship with keyboard instruments. He composed his earliest lyrics to melodies created by his elder brother at the piano in their Calcutta home (Kripalani 1980: 63), but Rabindranath later rejected the harmonium, citing its

inability to render the glides, ornaments, and microtonal pitch variations of Indian melodies (Rahaim 2011: 668). Indian modernism, to Tagore's mind, must not amount to a wholesale adoption of all things Western.

Rabindranath's music reveals its modernity in many departures from the conventions of Indian art music:

- 1 Primacy of lyrics over melody. Indian classical musicians regard the rules of raga as sacrosanct. Rabindranath allowed the poetic text to determine his use of pitch, observing or breaking raga conventions in order to serve the meaning of his lyrics.
- 2 Set compositions, in which the pitch and rhythm are fixed, with no scope for elaboration. This is a significant departure from Indian classical traditions, in which the singer takes the composition as a springboard for extended rounds of improvisation (Wade 1973: 448).
- 3 Loosely prescribed orchestration. Tagore did not compose for fixed ensembles, but he imposed restrictions. His dismissal of the harmonium, and embrace of the Bengali esraj, revealed Rabindranath's emphasis on Indian, and especially Bengali, musical timbres.
- 4 Musical eclecticism. Tagore drew inspiration from a wide variety of Indian musical forms. Indian classical musicians, in contrast, typically confine themselves to one or two genres. In Tagore's music, virtuosity resides in the composer's wedding of text with melody; the singer acts as an interpreter, rather than an improvising virtuoso.
- 5 Modern Bengali lyrics, rather than the archaic Hindustani of courtly music. Rabindranath refused to confine his literary imagination to a repertoire of conventional clichés. His choice of language also reflected the end of imperial hegemony. He wrote for an emerging milieu of middle-class literati, which no longer looked to North India to set the standard for 'classical' arts. Rabindranath's vernacular became its own centre, moving Hindi-Urdu to the periphery.
- 6 A wide variety of poetic themes, emphasizing nature, the adoration of an unseen and unnamed beloved, and the longing for that beloved. Tagore inherited these themes from Hindustani, Bengali, Hindu, Sufi, and theatre music, but he applied them with an unprecedented variety of expression, drawing on his cultural inheritance to present a new, humanistic, and individualistic message.
- 7 Artistic ownership and control. Most North Indian classical compositions are anonymous, the property, not of an individual, but of a stylistic lineage. Tagore 'owned' all that he composed.

In the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, we find the culmination of a process of syncretic modernism sparked by Bengal's early orientalist. Informed by generations of cultural interaction with the West, Rabindranath produced music that was truly modern, resulting from the mature impulse of a self-aware artist.

GRAMOPHONE AND BROADCAST MEDIA

The loss of courtly patronage drove traditional ustads and courtesans into new workplaces: theatres, recording studios, concert halls, music schools, and the salons

of urban red-light districts (Farrell 1997: 112). When it seemed that traditional musicians were playing a losing hand in their struggle for survival, India's nascent recording industry dealt them a series of strong cards. In 1902, Gauhar Jan became the first major recording artist of British Gramophone and Typewriter Limited. Other courtesans followed her into successful recording careers (117–18). Ownership of a gramophone player was a powerful status symbol. That status, and the physical relocation of the singer's voice from the salon to the home, purified these early classical recordings of social stigma. Records brought the courtly repertoire to a huge new audience, which had never heard such music (114).

The format of 78 rpm records, limited to three minutes and fifteen seconds per side, made it impossible to render full classical expositions. Singers became adept at fitting performances into the miniature format. Narayan Rao Vyas recorded with two disciples playing tanpuras behind him in the studio. One kept an eye on the clock, and tapped Pandit Vyas on the shoulder after one minute as a signal to move from the composition into slow elaborations, after two minutes to proceed to rhythmic play and fast running passages, and again at three minutes to begin the thrice-repeated rhythmic formula that would end the performance (Vyas 1992).

India's first radio stations opened in 1927, and All India Radio was christened in 1936 (Kippen 1988: 27). Radio broadcasts forced musicians to fit their performances into fixed time slots. Modernization took on a mechanical character. It was not the modernism of artists inspired to create something new, but rather the taming of creative impulses to make them conform to the limitations of the media.

Long playing records came to India in 1960. One of the earliest featured a posthumous release of the vocalist Dattatreya Vishnu Paluskar, in a 20-minute rendition of Rag Shri (Joshi 1984: 89–91). His approach, purely classical, showed a full range of stylistic devices within the khyal genre. Musicians in the 1960s luxuriated in the expansive format of LP recordings. Vocalists redefined the meaning of *vilambit* (slow); while the pace of urban life was accelerating, classical vocalists decelerated their performance style.

As LPs allowed artists to present recordings of slower raga performances, the international tours of classical instrumentalists Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, and Alla Rakha in the 1960s accelerated performance tempos. Western audiences, uninitiated in the subtleties of slow, methodical raga elaboration,

loved the virtuoso question-and-answer interplay between sitar and tabla, and, therefore, Indian performers began performing in that way to please them. This method of playing created a new style of performance and gave the tabla player elevated status.

(Hast 1988: 16)

This new emphasis on virtuosity and rhythmic displays, developed by Indian performers abroad, found a ready audience in India.

Alongside the modern emphasis on rhythmic extremes, some artists explored melodic frontiers either by combining features of two traditional ragas in a new 'compound' raga, or by performing several ragas serially as a single concert item (Raja 2005: 138–48). Vocalist Veena Sahasrabuddhe sometimes combines as many as 15 different ragas in a single song. These raga-garlands differ from the earlier

experiments of Rabindranath Tagore, in that Tagore's departures from raga emerged from the primacy of the poetic text in his music. Raga medleys sometimes reinforce lyrical meaning, but the cleverness and novelty of melodic transitions is their main focus.

CONCLUSION

This essay began by distinguishing between creative modernism and imitative modernization. In the Western sphere, musical modernism may have begun with Gustav Mahler's stretching and bending of harmonic conventions. It proceeded to explode and discard those conventions, moving into the realms of chromaticism, atonality, serialism, polytonality, and chance procedure.

Rabindranath Tagore may have been South Asia's Mahler, but we have yet to hear from her Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, or John Cage. The classicization of Indian art music, as it transitioned from a protected courtly tradition to a modern national one, created new institutions and new classes of performers, teachers, and consumers, but it did not bring a modernist explosion of style comparable to that of modern art music in the West.

The reasons for this are formal and cultural. Paradoxically, the improvisational nature of Indian music works against radical innovation. Indian classical musicians perform improvisational miracles because their training operates at the level of learned reflex. Overriding these reflexes would be as difficult as deliberately violating the grammar of one's mother tongue. This difficulty is compounded by the sacralization of raga conventions, and by the interactive nature of performance, in which audience responses are essential to inspire the performer.

Culturally, Western musical modernism corresponded to contemporary movements in philosophy, art, and literature. The explosion and dismissal of musical conventions mirrored existentialism, impressionism, expressionism, and the polyvocal abstractions of James Joyce. All of these 'isms' were related to a broad cultural shift towards secularism, which gave artists permission to violate conventional ideological and aesthetic principles.

At the turn of the twentieth century, South Asia's shift towards secularism had not progressed so far as that in the West. India's social groups had to arrive at both internal and external agreements as to the extent and pace of change. Music often provided such groups with a sense of cultural continuity, as they struggled to stay afloat amid a turbulent sea of unpredictable political, economic, and technological developments.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

VISUAL ARTS IN SOUTH ASIA



*Parul Dave-Mukherji, Simone Wille,
AKM Khademul Haque and T. Sanathanan*

BEGINNINGS: COLONIAL MODERNISM

Early modernist painting in India emerged around the first decade of the twentieth century, with the first Indian art movement beginning in Calcutta, the capital of the colonial regime. The stage was set between the academic realism that prevailed in the colonial art schools set up in Calcutta, Lahore, and Madras, and the nationalist style that grew out of the cultural syncretism of different Asian cultures. Bengal took a lead role in cultural nationalism and promoting an indigenous (Swadeshi) ideology



Figure 15.1 Installation by Atul Dodiya entitled 'Between the Spider and the Lamp'.

of art, derived from a modern interpretation of Buddhist and Hindu aesthetics. Despite the Pan-Asian impetus underlying the appropriation of ‘the style and conventions of Mughal miniatures and the Japanese wash technique by artists such as Abanindranath Tagore, the overall thrust of Swadeshi visual aesthetics possessed a sectarian character’ (Dadi 2010: 57). While the rise of national and cultural self-definition brought with it a rejection of British academic oil painting, it at the same time fostered religious identity, which was to later fragment the subcontinent into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan.

1947: PARTITION AND THE RISE OF THE NATIONAL MODERN

India’s independence from British colonialism in 1947 led to a bloody aftermath resulting in the partitioning of the country into two independent nation states: India and Pakistan. In 1971 another partition created Bangladesh out of former East Pakistan. Today, when we look back at these tortuous moments, seldom do we find a direct reference to the trauma of partition in the art works. Perhaps, cultural amnesia of partition marked the entry of South Asian artists into the post-colonial era. In India, what was evident was the euphoria of internationalism when many artists such as F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza, and Akbar Padamsee headed westwards, particularly to Paris, perceived as the epicentre of modernism.

While post-colonial India witnessed the rise of new art institutions – such as Lalit Kala Akademi, the National Gallery of Modern Art, and a major artists’ collective, the Shilpi Chakra in Delhi – Pakistan lacked an institutional background. The only two institutions that emerged were the Department of Fine Arts at Punjab University and the Mayo School of Art. The latter was founded in the late nineteenth century by colonial authorities and became the National College of Art (NCA) in 1958. The situation in East Pakistan was also not too conducive, with no history of an art school. The main art institution in Dhaka was the Government Institute of Arts established in 1949 by Zainul Abedin. The aim of all these post-colonial art institutions was to offer a platform for artists to address the binary of tradition and modernity and render art meaningful in the progress of the nation.

How the concept of nation was conceived in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka was quite varied, with different valence attached to democracy and secularism. What marked Indian modernism as different from that of its neighbours across the 1950s to 1970s was its ideology of modernity as envisaged by post-colonial India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, which subsumed the religious identity of its citizen artists under an overarching category of the nation.

On the other hand, Pakistan emerged as an Islamic nation-state, which directly affected the way the artists saw their identity. Comparison between the careers of Abdur Rahman Chughtai and M.F. Hussain may be demonstrative of the ideological divide between a modern Muslim and a modern Indian artist. Despite his contact with Calcutta and the Bengal School, Chughtai emphasized his connection to Lahore and the ‘Punjab School’, which consisted of Muslim artists and thus stood in counterpoint to the Bengal School with its predominance of Hindu artists (Dadi 2010: 61; see also Nesom 1984). Chughtai’s early works were based on Hindu mythology, but soon shifted to incorporate Islamic and Mughal aesthetics.¹

Conversely, Hussain was the most representative artist of the Indian style of modernism. He freely interpreted Hindu epics and mythology and fashioned a modernist semi-figurative and semi-abstract idiom. Until the end of the 1980s, he enjoyed a reputation as ‘the Picasso of India’, but later, as Hindu fundamentalism overtook national politics, he became increasingly embroiled in controversies and legal wrangles that starkly ‘exposed’ his Muslim identity and forced him to lead the life of an exile.

In a sense, colonial modernity prevailed in the post-colonial subcontinent through its legacy of art institutions. Moreover, countries enlisted their artists to function as nation-builders. This may be seen as one of the factors for the different trajectory that modernism took in the subcontinent: a modernism without an avant-garde.

EXODUS TO THE WEST: COSMOPOLITAN MODERNISM

In India, independence from Britain in 1947 coincided with the formation of the Progressive Artists Group in Bombay by F.N. Souza, K.H. Ara, H. Raza, H.A. Gade, M.F. Hussain, and S.K. Bakre. They marked India’s arrival as a nation among nations and exuded a new confidence in aligning themselves with international modernism on their own terms. Rudy van Leyden and Walter Langhammer played a crucial role in creating a public for their art and broadening their horizons, through their newspaper writings. In line with such cosmopolitanism was the art scene in Pakistan. From the mid 1950s to mid 1960s – also the time of General Mohammed Ayub Khan’s military regime (1958–69) – Lahore’s art circle opened to modernism. In Sri Lanka, the 1950s marked a rejection of the internationalism that had prevailed from the 1930s with the formation of the 43 Group under Lionel Wendt. In 1956, the state made Sinhala the only official language of Sri Lanka, lighting the fuse of ethnic tensions among minority groups. This situation was aggravated in 1978 when Buddhism was declared the official state religion of Sri Lanka. The subsequent rise of sub-nationalisms and eventually full civil war between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil (LTTE) reflected the intensity of identity politics, which was to preoccupy generations of artists across the subcontinent.

INTERNATIONALISM VERSUS INDIGENISM, 1960s TO 1970s

If the 1950s marked a turn to internationalism in most of South Asia, it also prepared the ground for its dialectical, Indigenous Other, to gather momentum. Reliance on Euro-American abstract modernism was condemned as capitulating to Western hegemony and the past was searched for pre-modern models. K.C.S. Panikkar in South India and J. Swaminathan in North India were important champions of a non-derivative modernism. They found alternative artistic practices in traditional decorative arts, ancient Tamil and Sanskrit scripts, and tribal art. The Bharat Bhavan, a cultural institution and museum in Bhopal, resulted from Swaminathan’s wish to create a dialogue between the modernists and traditional artists, and to arrive at an Indigenous modernism independent of Euro-American influence.

In 1981, around the time of the Festivals of India that carried Indian art and culture to the West, a major exhibition was conceived. Entitled *Place for People* by

Geeta Kapur, it featured Vivan Sundaram, Gulam Sheikh, Jogen Chodhury, Nalini Malani, and Bhupen Khakhar. It aimed to move debates about art beyond the binary of tradition versus modernity and abstract versus figurative art. It inaugurated a major trend of narrative painting. With its headquarters in the Baroda art school, it valorized the cosmopolitan as well as the local, finding as much affinity with Ron Kitaj's paintings as with medieval Siennese frescoes. The word 'people' in the title of the show was intended as a political category in response to the 1977 Emergency under Indira Gandhi, when democracy was suspended in the alleged interest of a greater public good. What was first imagined as a political gesture was soon institutionalized, and the Baroda Narrative School faced a serious criticism in 1987 from the Kerala radical group, including Anita Dube, Krishna Kumar, Alex Mathew, Rimzon, Prabhakaran, Jyothi Basu, among others. Largely embracing an expressionist-figurative style, they sought an alternative space for their practice, away from the commercial gallery system.

Indigenous expression took another form in Pakistan with the rise of calligraphic modernism. By the late 1950s and well into the 1970s, 'calligraphic modernism formed an increasingly influential modality in Pakistani art' (Dadi 2010: 134). This was not a unique development, as artists from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia partook in a movement that transformed Arabic calligraphy into modern art.² In Pakistan, Hanif Ramay, Iqal Geoffrey, and Anwar Jalal Shemza contributed important calligraphic modernist works. Yet the country's celebrated artist, Sadequain, most effectively developed the language of calligraphic modernism during a time of increasing Islamicization in the 1970s and 1980s. His many public works, commissions, and murals helped open up art to a wider public and are credited with 'contribut[ing] to the development of translocal modernist Muslim aesthetics during the era of nationalism' (Dadi 2009: 48).

The political upsurge that led to the war between East and West Pakistan and resulted in an independent Bangladesh was not only a military action; educational institutions participated in it, too. The students and teachers of the Art Institute in Dhaka weaponized their art. For instance, Quamrul's poster *Annihilate These Demons* portrays General Yahia Khan as a demon. Art was seen as significant by the nascent state in contrast to the conservative attitude of the earlier regime, and new horizons opened up for younger artists. Under state patronage, public art projects in the form of large paintings and sculptures beautifying government buildings gathered impetus and the themes remained predictably nationalistic.

One of the most important steps forward was the establishment of a National Academy for Fine Arts, Shilpakala Academy, in 1974. Apart from sponsoring and conserving artworks in Bangladesh, the Academy initiated the Asian Art Biennale in 1981, which has now become one of the most celebrated art exhibitions in Asia. New art education centres were set up in Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Khulna. Taking the opportunities to interact with the wider world of art, they brought a much-needed diversity of practice to end the monotony of the previous decade. Abstraction remained the major style, but at the same time the strong sense of patriotism brought back the folk traditions and realism. Monirul Islam and Shahabuddin are among the most celebrated artists of the decade. Both of them are educated and based abroad; Monirul was trained in the University of Madrid and Shahabuddin in Paris. Monirul's *Time & Tide* (etching and aquatint, 1984) and Shahabuddin's *Freedom Fighter*

(2000) best demonstrate the trends of the decade, although they were done a little later. In *Freedom Fighter*, Shahabuddin demonstrates the pride and strength of the victory in the war for liberation through a dynamism of the human body. Shahid Kabir, Mansurul Karim, Mahmudul Huq, Kalidas Karmokar, and Farida Zaman were among a host of new generation artists who started their career in this decade, while the old masters including Zainul himself were also active.

1990s: THE GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY

If the 1980s witnessed the beginning of doubt around the modern nation across South Asia, the 1990s dealt a stronger blow to cultural nationalism, its ethos of secularism, and state art institutions. With the opening up of the Indian economy to the forces of global capitalism and the uncertainty that attended it, anxiety permeated the middle class. This anxiety crystallized in fears of invasion by foreign cultural influences and paved the way for an upsurge in religious fundamentalism supported by right-wing political parties. A major disjunction with the past occurred with the rise of economic liberalization and identity politics. Together they exposed the myths of modernity as articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, the fragility of secularism, and the exclusion of caste from cultural practices.

Major shifts in the social landscape of the country that witnessed the rise of communal politics followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, and the advent of information technology impinged upon the political consciousness of the artists at a deep level. For them, the traditional genres and media of painting and sculpture could no longer adequately represent contemporary reality. What was really desired was an art form that would turn on different aesthetics and that implicated artists within the realm of representation. Installation art fulfilled this cultural need with its aesthetics of immersion that allowed a multi-sensorial engagement and a hybrid interplay between texts and images. This art form also opened the space of conceptual art to South Asian artists. In Delhi and Mumbai, Vivan Sundaram and Nalini Malani emerged as pioneers of installation art around the themes of trauma of the Hindu Muslim riots.

After the Mandal Commission report that was to radically change the electoral democracy and public institutions in India, caste, which was a repressed category under Nehruvian modernity, entered the public sphere and shook the foundations of political sovereignty premised upon secularism. When artists like Savi Savarkar brought identity politics within his practice of figurative painting, he politicized figuration.

From the 1990s in Sri Lanka, social status and geographic location no longer held sway in the way the male-dominated and Colombo-centric elite of the previous decades had. Instead, a more pluralistic and critically engaged practice emerged in response to the militarization of the country and its consumerist culture. Art works were characterized by their critiques of the State, the machinery of war, and the emotional torment of the individual living within a divided society. Autobiographical approaches linked to experiences of torture, alienation, and displacement appeared alongside direct responses to the war. Born out of a conflict-ridden society, these themes gave rise to explorations of identity based on gender, sexuality, caste, and ethnicity. Artists also used ideas related to archiving and ethnography to reflect on

the politics of memory. Pop images from the growing urban environment also impacted art practices both visually and conceptually. The period represents an attempt by artists to rework modernism, either intuitively or cerebrally, using formalist experiments and socialist critique. The art scene, while assimilating and responding to these changes, was also exposed to global art trends, especially through the strengthening of regional ties and affinities. Locally, Colombo-based organizations like the German Cultural Institute, Alliance Francaise, British Council, and George Keyt Foundation were the major supporters of contemporary art in the 1990s. Art networks established through international exhibitions held at Fukuoka Asian Art Gallery (Japan) and the Queensland Gallery (Australia), as well as artists' residencies and workshops organized through South Asian networks such as Khoj (India), Vasal (Pakistan), Brito Art Trust (Bangladesh), and Sutra (Nepal), along with the groundbreaking Colombo/Jaffna Anum Puram exhibition held at Jaffna Public Library in 2004 all helped to introduce criticality, new platforms, and modes of operation, along with questions about the role of art, and hence the artist, within society. Put more explicitly, they marked an attempt by artists to remake/unmake the idea of the nation (see Qadri 2009).

In 1992, Jagath Weerasinghe held a solo exhibition of paintings titled 'Anxiety' that focused for the first time on the plight of the individual within a divided, war-ridden society. In 1994 Sharmini Pereira, an independent curator, curated *New Approaches in Contemporary Sri Lankan Art*. This path-breaking exhibition recalled the group shows of the 43 Group but differed from them, in that it marked out new lines of affiliation between an entirely new grouping of artists, such as Jagath Weerasinghe, Chandraguptha Thenuwara, Tissa de Alwis, Kingsley Gunatilleke, Tilak Samarawickrema, Laki Senanayake, and Druvinka Madevela, many of whom had not been seen before. It also introduced the role of a curator and the presentation of an art exhibition as a non-commercial event. In a similar spirit of provocation, the end of the decade saw the formation of a new artists' collective, the No Order Group in 1999. This collective of radical voices included Weerasinghe and Chandraguptha Thenuwara among its members, as well as key artists such as Anoli Perera, Kingsley Gunatileka, Muhanned Cader, and G.R. Constantine. The aim of the group was to question the category of fine art and introduce modes of art making that were concept-based.

Until the early 1990s, art in Pakistan was primarily concerned with formalist and abstract issues in a late modernist sense. However, during the 1990s, the art scene experienced considerable change. While tradition, cultural encounters throughout history and modern Western confrontation have been greatly responsible for shaping Pakistan's art scene over the years, technological and media transformation is a new phenomenon that arose during the last decade of the twentieth century. The distribution of global TV material directly into people's homes and villages influenced ideas about the outside world as well as the local situation (Mirza 2010: 19). This engagement and investigation with popular urban and visual culture influenced a large number of artists, resulting in the production of influential bodies of work. Huma Mulji (born 1970) and Naiza Khan's (born 1968) addressed the many conflicting urban changes.

Until the 1990s, the NCA was Pakistan's foremost art institution, but another notable art school, the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVSAA), came

up in Karachi. These two institutions were influential in shaping a new generation of artists that questioned established canons and began to develop new strategies that would either be concerned with an ongoing interrogation of tradition or with the visuality of the everyday.

The careers of the third generation of artists from Pakistan began during a time of deep transformation – a change that appeared on the political level and was reflected in society. After the gloomy years of Zia ul Haq's dictatorship, a decade of provisional democracy brought hope and opportunity (1988–99). Despite the short-lived hope for a time of stability (the country's political system proved unstable and the spread of the Taliban caused yet another threat), the 1990s opened up new possibilities for artists thanks to a wider public recognition of art within Pakistan.

In this context, the divide between India and Pakistan became a renewed point of interest for a number of artists of mainly the younger generation on both sides of the border. Bani Abidi (born 1971), who divides her time between Pakistan, India, and Berlin, has engaged ironically with the problematic situation of India and Pakistan and the complexities of personal identities within South Asia. In a complex series of photo and video narratives surrounding the myth of the Arab general Mohammad Bin Qasim, who is said to have brought Islam to South Asia, Abidi interrogates the construction of nationalist myths through constructed histories that serve as a mode of official representation, thus reminding the viewer that any reconstruction and revival of the past is full of pitfalls.

Karachi's pop-art movement was not confined to Karachi, as it also reached Lahore. Rashid Rana (born 1968) took inspiration from advertisements and Punjabi cinema posters, and incorporated mass-produced products. Imran Qureshi (born 1972), Aisha Khalid (born 1972), Nusra Latif Qureshi (born 1973), and Muhammad Zeeshan (born 1980), to name a few, have achieved wide recognition.

Since the 1990s in Bangladesh, engagement with public space and local visual culture began to flourish. Ruhul Amin Kajol introduced street art using a large, public space and sharing the effort collectively with a group of young artists; Dhali Al-Mamoon came up with conceptual art in the 1980s, Saidul Haque Juse popularized the masks, Mahbubur Rahman and Ashok Karmokar experimented with installation art, and Shafiqul Kabir Chandan brought back Rashid Choudhury's memories with his tapestries in the 1990s. The emergence of a contingent of women artists is another important aspect of the period. Nazlee Laila Mansur, Dilara Begum Jolly, Rokeya Sultana, Niloofar Chaman, Atia Islam Anne, Taiyeba Begum Lipi, and Kanakchampa Chakma are among them. Among others, A.B. Alvi, Ranjit Das, Mohammad Younus, G.S. Kabir, Nisar Hossain, Abdus Shakur Shah, and Shishir Bhattacharjee dominated this era with a number of younger generation artists thriving in excellence. Although he is more famous for his witty cartoons, Shishir's series of paintings in mixed media, *Come and See the Game* (1996), demonstrates the latest trends of experimentation in medium, form, and execution that is going on in Bangladeshi art.

Today, artists in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh practice in an increasingly globalizing world with more possibility of a trans-regional dialogue among them. The ease of travel, flow of capital, internet communication, and institutional collaborations – and now the burgeoning art fairs – allow for conversation among these sites of modernity not necessarily mediated by the West. Under these conditions, they evoke the past and different experiences generated by a shared

colonial history, and respond to challenges of the present that range from uneven modernization to ethnic violence and religious fundamentalism. Despite the many odds stacked against them – fragile democracy, ecological crisis, and fraught public sphere – artists continue to experiment and intervene within the larger space of the global contemporary and their more local art worlds.

NOTES

1. See also Kapur and Naqvi.
2. For a comparative study of calligraphic modernism, see Dadi (2009) 41–51. See also Wijdan, chapters 15 and 16.

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PART III

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MODERNIZATION, DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AND MODERNITY IN CURRENT AFRICAN DEBATES



Yahia Mahmoud

Though they often escape critical scrutiny, concepts such as modernism, modernity, and modernization are at the heart of the concept of development, and thus omnipresent in development studies. In the late nineteenth century, the new discipline of sociology undertook to study, explain, and guide the social transformations unfolding in Europe. Equally, the relationship between the machinery of knowledge construction and that of the modern state was tightened, with concrete consequences on how social life was perceived, organized, and lived. Following the spirit of the Enlightenment, the founders of sociology¹ aimed to study social phenomena as their counterparts in natural sciences studied nature. Often, this ambition, coupled with the tightened bond of power/knowledge,² led to reductive representations of social realities through dichotomized and hierarchized categories: modern vs. traditional, rational vs. irrational, urban vs. rural, rich vs. poor, developed vs. underdeveloped, and so on. These dichotomies initially affected power relations in Europe, but other geographic areas and societies soon became objects of study for European social sciences. European production of images of other societies has a long history and remains central for constructions of European identities. The wave of Western European expansions from the late fifteenth century onwards marked a new and more aggressive era in the use of science to describe, categorize, analyze, and subordinate other cultures.³ Science in general and social sciences in particular became crucial elements of colonialism. Broadly speaking, the Middle East and Asia were the first to be scrutinized by European social sciences, then the Americas and finally Africa. Focusing on the last of these, I start here with a rough picture of the meaning and evolution of modernism, modernity, and modernization in development studies. I then explore how modernization and modernity narratives have informed some African intellectual streams. Finally, I assess some of the tendencies in the debate today.

MODERNIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

The late twentieth century is to development studies what the late nineteenth was to sociology. The radical socio-economic transformations brought to the nineteenth century by the industrial revolution and the consolidation of capitalism in Western

Europe generated social unrest in much of the continent. These events introduced a wide array of objects and subjects for social theory. Excepting ethnology, tightly associated with the study of the 'other', almost all social sciences⁴ engaged in the study of how capitalism was transforming and shaping Europe. A recurrent theme was the movement from traditional to modern societies and its various social implications (e.g. Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber). The body of European knowledge created between the late nineteenth century and the 1940s, in combination with the international power relations arising from the Second World War, came to define development studies.⁵ Initially, economics dominated, driven by the belief that economic transformation and growth would inevitably lead to modern societies (e.g. Rosenstein-Rodan, Rostow, Harrod-Domar, Lewis). In the 1950s, development economics were challenged by other disciplines claiming that focusing solely on economic transformation would not lead to the desired results. Consequently, the idea of modernization was broadened to encompass social and political transformation. Various theories and strategies were pursued to help the developing world – Africa in particular – to 'modernize'. Development studies became strongly attached to policy-making, reinforcing the nexus of knowledge–power. Embodying this nexus, development agencies were integrated into Western state structures. The explanations why Western countries embarked on 'modernizing' the rest of the world are many and controversial, ranging from philanthropy to economic exploitation. Any overview of modernist intellectual currents in Africa must therefore ask: what does *modernization* mean in the context of development studies? What are its key characteristics? Has its meaning(s) changed over time? What is its legacy?

Etymologically, the defining element of the term *modernus*⁶ is time. However, development studies initially privileged a spatial dimension: the modern frequently meant what is taking place in 'the West just now'. This is why some scholars equate modernization with westernization while others make a distinction. The latter argue that modernization requires a change in beliefs about how the material world operates, while westernization entails a change in beliefs about how one should live.⁷ As with other social sciences, development studies struggled in the late 1950s to conceptualize and find metrics for modernization. For some, modernization was a process; for others, a state (Bendix 1967). Similarly, there was no consensus on the adequate unit of observation and analysis: did it occur at the societal (Levy 1966, Lerner 1958), communal (Abu-Lughod 1964, Sjöberg 1964) or individual level (Kahl 1968, Inkeles 1969)? Next, social scientists had to define modernization's characteristics. Despite the large number of approaches and theories that emerged about how to identify modern societies, there are three recurrent traits: industrial capitalism with economic growth; a political system that guarantees public participation; and a degree of individual autonomy. In conjunction with these, measurable characteristics such as the degree of urbanization, agricultural efficiency, health and health-care standards, literacy levels, media participation, and secularization of cultural norms dominate development research.⁸

During modernization theory's dominance of development studies in the 1950s to 1960s, many newly independent African countries appeared to be already moving towards constructing modern societies as Europe had done. Marx's famous verdict that the 'country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed,

the image of its own future' (Marx 1967 [1867]: 8–9) was implicit in the intellectual spirit of the time. However, this optimism was soon questioned. In the late 1960s a group of scholars known as *modernization revisionists*⁹ criticized the modernization approach on several key points. First, they did not perceive the relationship of modernity-tradition as a zero-sum game as their predecessors had. Second, to them traditional institutions and attitudes were not necessarily hindrances to modernization. Third, they rejected the idea that modernization was unilinear, with modern features gradually replacing traditional ones. They argued that traditional features might, in fact, be revitalized and strengthened by modernization (see Schraeder 2004).

Another stream of thought that influenced African studies during the 1960s and early 1970s was the dependency school. This heterogeneous school was influenced by several Marxist theses (e.g. Rosa Luxembourg and V.I. Lenin on international trade) on the geographic effects of capitalist expansion and a set of theories on international trade (e.g. Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer) from the 1940s. Dependency theorists argued that the origins of underdevelopment and economic stagnation in the Global South could not be understood unless the entire international economic system was studied. They saw development and underdevelopment as outcomes of the same process (e.g. Baran, Frank, Amin). In other words, underdevelopment was not a condition but a consequence of development. Rodney (1972) argued that before the spread of international capitalism the African continent had been developing both politically and economically, but capitalism's incursion via European colonialism had hindered independent development: Europe became richer and more developed at Africa's expense. For the dependency school, the way out of this unequal relation was a detachment from the international economic system. Many of these arguments were embraced in political and intellectual discourses in Africa, and some survive now.

At a first sight *modernization* and *dependency* seem to represent opposites, but the common ground is bigger than we might expect. As correctly argued by Manzo, for all the criticism of modernization theory the

dependency school was unable to detach itself fully from the assumptions of the mainstream paradigm it sought to undermine because it was equally rooted in the nineteenth-century social theory [...] and left intact the classical image of the Western state as the image or model of what it means to be 'developed'.

(1991: 30)

Furthermore, recognizing the role played by different geographic regions in European wealth accumulation never led the dependency school to question modernity as exclusively and monolithically European. Instead, modernity is a multiple and shared condition: 'Western patterns of modernity are not the only authentic modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others' (Eisenstadt, qtd. in Houben and Schrempf 2008: 9). Some researchers indicate modern features in non-Western societies well before contact (see Woodside 2006, Kahn 2001). Others emphasize modernity's historical dynamics and assert that the '[g]enealogy of cultural forms is about circulation across region, the history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practices' (Appadurai 1996: 17, qtd. in Houben and Schrempf 2008). Yet others, such as Mitchell (2000) question

the notion of multiple modernities as adaptation to local circumstances presupposes a singular origin. At the same time, a local view underestimates modernity's powers of expansion, subordination, and exclusion. Mitchell calls this process representation: modernity is staged, a representation that unavoidably incorporates the production of difference and displacement (Houben and Schrempf 2008: 11).

The construction of Western representations of Africa, which started during colonial domination, has become a veil on the continent's realities. The matter is of such magnitude that no genuine intellectual effort to approach Africa's realities could proceed without confronting those narratives. Distinguished African and Afro-American thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Amílcar Cabral, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have successfully engaged in this enterprise. Evaluating the meaning of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in this context Gikandi (2001) asserts:

For reading *Things Fall Apart* brought me to the sudden realization that fiction was not merely about a set of texts which one studied for the Cambridge Overseas exam which, for my generation, had been renamed the East African Certificate of Education; on the contrary, literature was about real and familiar worlds, of culture and human experience, of politics and economics, now re-routed through a language and structure that seemed at odds with the history or geography books we were reading at the time.

(2001: 1)

Humanities in general and fiction in particular are often more successful than social sciences in constructing – and deconstructing – social realities. This is partly due to the parochial character of many social sciences disciplines, until the recent revival of interdisciplinary research. In development studies, for instance, post-colonial works on the socio-cultural consequences of colonialism such as Fanon (1952, 1961), Césaire (1955), Memmi (1957), and Said (1978) received no serious attention until the 1990s. Sylvester (1999) argued that development studies and post-colonial studies focused on the same topics, but ignored each other. While development studies sought to understand socio-economic and political dynamics in the developing world, it ignored its Eurocentric colonial heritage. Similarly, post-colonial studies over-emphasized issues of identity and representation but neglected economics and politics (Sylvester 1999, Abrahamsen 2003). Today, post-colonial studies inspire much of the research in development studies, and explore traditional development studies topics (see McEwan 2009). This might be a small step towards studying social transformation and adaptation to global capitalism in ways that transcend stereotyped dichotomies and Eurocentric paradigms of modernity.

Just as colonialism's consequences were manifold with distinct local particularities, so were intellectual reactions to it. Scholars from various disciplines have taken up several themes to dispute and reveal the reductionist character of Western mainstream paradigms and colonial stereotypes. These range from revealing how European history texts had been biased against Africans (e.g. Diop 1954, 1960; Bernal 1987) to the unequal economic exchange imposed on the continent (e.g. Rodney 1972; Amin 1972). In recent debates two deeply intertwined and recurrent themes are the role of African leadership and elites and the decolonization of the mind. Some see African ruling elites

as bearers and defenders of modernity, but others as a hindrance to it. As these issues are central to African modernist cultural production, the next section presents and discusses how some African scholars have approached these topics.

MODERNITY AND AFRICAN RULING ELITES

The decline of the European colonial system after the Second World War represented a period of hope for many African societies. After almost a century of struggle for independence, country after country was ready to fulfill its dream. The struggles varied with context, but the objectives were the same. Similarly, all struggles had symbols and leaders that varied in style, objectives, and ideology. Many of the leaders were more successful in leading armed struggles than in constructing modern functioning societies, whilst others paid with their lives but stayed in the memories of the masses as true to those original dreams. Two features unite these leaders. First, they all aspired to construct modern nations capable of competing with other nations on equal terms. Second, all of them were educated in a Western ethos. Today, some argue that Africa's post-colonial ruling elites have prolonged the conditions of colonial rule (e.g. Fanon 1952, 1961; Bhabha 2004; Monga 1996; Araeen 2010). Rasheed Araeen refers to these as a 'surrogate bourgeoisie that takes pride in mimicking Western values in the name of Africa's modern progress' (Araeen 2010: 277):

[C]olonialism was not a monolithic regime under which everything was carried out by force of stick or gun. The success of a colonial regime depended not only in its violence but also on liberal means by which it successfully enticed natives to participate in its consolidation and administration. This produced an educated class in Africa, as in other parts of the colonial world, which accepted the modernity of a Western system and, by adopting it, not only took part in the colonial regime but ultimately took over its very administration in the name of postcolonial independence and self-determination.

(2010: 278)

At an early stage of independence African revolutionary thinkers warned that political independence should be seen only as a small step towards a real decolonization, including a decolonization of the mind. Only then does 'freedom from servitude and *the possibility of an autonomous African subject*' arise (Mbembe 2001: 14). One of the most prominent of those early revolutionary voices was that of Amílcar Cabral. Three intertwined ideas recur in his thinking. First, every society should be able to create its own culture, and master the techniques and processes that allow for self-regeneration and self-renewal. Second, without underestimating what can be learned from other cultures, including the former colonizer, progress will come only if African societies can liberate their own productive capacities. Third, due to cultural diversity the struggle for liberation must allow positive values to merge, and diversity and tolerance to thrive (see Jeyifo 2007, Creary 2012). These proposals are by definition modern and in Cabral's discourse they are justified in the name of development and progress. He refers very seldom to modernity but frequently to liberation, development, and social change. Cabral's achievements are not just theoretical. He developed strategies for political participation decades before the birth of participatory methods

in Western universities.¹⁰ He championed elected village committees that included women, promoted girls' education, and challenged forced marriages decades before Western engagement with gender issues in Africa (see Cabral 1970, 1979; Fogel 1986). Cabral also insisted that progress should not come at the expense of cultural origins and values. Above all, Cabral's theory and practice see no contradiction between learning from others while staying close to the sources.

The issue of the decolonization of the mind generates more debate among African scholars today than it did on the eve of independence.¹¹ An oversimplification might allow us to discern an evolution in this debate, where the object/subject of study is shifting. The first wave of critics (e.g. Fanon, Achebe, Cabral, Diop) emphasized the external factor, noting how colonialism not only occupied the land and resources, but subjugated the minds of Africans with a false history. The second wave shifted the focus towards internal factors – modern African leaders – blaming them for the inability to deliver the promises of modernity. The most recent wave focuses on the 'ordinary' African's responsibility for failures and stagnation. Perhaps the best representative of this genre is Achille Mbembe, who 'glosses over the fact that the so-called "ordinary people" never really think about themselves as ordinary in the sense of having limited aspirations or baser instincts' (Zegeye and Vambe 2011: 20). For Mbembe, Africa's problems are generated by the interaction between ruler and ruled:

In the postcolony, an intimate tyranny links the rulers with the ruled. Just as obscenity is only another aspect of munificence, and vulgarity a normal condition of state power. If subjection appears more intense than it might be, this is because the subjects of the commandment have internalized authoritarian epistemology to the point where they reproduce themselves in all the minor circumstances of daily life.

(qtd. in Zegeye and Vambe 2011: 21)

Mbembe, like other scholars struggling with the issue of representation in the developing world, is trapped in the dilemma of denouncing the shortcomings of colonialist paternalism, and adhering to Western theoretical fallacies. He is prone to generalize about a continent where diversity is, perhaps, the most visible feature. In the *Provisional Notes on the Postcolony*, Mbembe stresses that 'the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, yet it has nonetheless an internal coherence' (Mbembe 1992: 3). Furthermore, he correctly claims that in 'order to account for both the mind-set and the effectiveness of post-colonial relations of power, we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination [...] These oppositions are not helpful, rather, they cloud our understanding of postcolonial relations' (1992: 3). Nonetheless, Mbembe ultimately fails to articulate an alternative approach for understanding post-colonial Africa.

SUMMING UP

To explore the meaning of modernity in Africa today, I started with the foundations of European modernity in the nineteenth century. With the rise of colonialism, modern Europe imposed the image of itself as *the* universal benchmark for rationality, development, and even humanity. Science, technology, and religion were used to

ensure the colonial enterprise, notably in development studies, a discipline designed to assist *other* societies to modernize. The eventual decline of colonialism led to skepticism about the European project of modernity as African thinkers uncovered the biased character of many Western social theories' representations. And while the post-colonial period did bring broad social progress, that progress is still measured in terms of Western modernity: democracy, economic development, etc. To understand this conundrum, African scholars have pointed in different directions. Some have focused on colonialism's detrimental effects. Others have blamed post-colonial African leadership's incapacity to bring about development and democracy. Yet others blame ordinary citizens for tolerating corrupted political systems.

All these analyses might be accurate for specific African contexts, but certainly not for all. As mentioned earlier, one of the most visible features of the continent is its diversity. The very same European modernity had been adopted, adapted, and re-adapted throughout the continent in ways that makes it difficult to ignore Africa's contribution to global modernities.

NOTES

1. The positivist line develops from August Comte through Herbert Spencer to Emile Durkheim, the founder of sociology.
2. See, e.g. Foucault.
3. See, e.g. Said.
4. This was certainly the case of sociology, political economy, and geography.
5. For more on modern development studies see Escobar, Preston, and Nederveen Pieterse.
6. Late Latin for 'just now'.
7. For earlier discussion of modernization vs. westernization see Rip.
8. Some argue that gender and environmental issues are features of a later or second modernity (e.g. Beck, et al.).
9. Among the authors associated with the modernization revisionism we can find Joseph Gusfield, Milton Singer, Reinhard Bendix, Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph, S.N. Eisenstadt, and F.C. Heesterman.
10. Many trace the participatory methods and action research back to the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and John Heron in the late 1960s, but it is the work of Robert Chambers in the 1980s that popularized participatory methods in the field of development studies.
11. See, e.g. Creary, Zegeye and Vambe, Eze, Araeen, Janis, Mbembe (2001), Kaphagawani, Monga, and Mudimbe.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FROM 'PROGRESS' TO POST-COLONIAL RELICS

Modernist architecture and design in Africa



William Cunningham Bissell

Given the impact that African sculptural forms had on European modernism in the twentieth century, African contributions to modernist architecture and design might initially seem minimal. As Antoni Folkers notes, 'Africa has never played a significant role in the debate on architecture' (Folkers 2010: 13). Indeed, references to African architecture or modern design are largely absent from most Euro-American surveys. This parochial view is informed by Eurocentrism, but the legacy of colonialism is also at fault as well, insofar as 'Africa' continues to be imagined as a timeless or traditional space where the 'modern' must originate from outside. As James Ferguson has observed, 'Africa always seems to come to the question of modernity from without. Generations of Western scholars have regarded Africa as either beyond the pale of the modern [...] or before it' (2007: 176). But from the outset, as Salah Hassan reminds us, two critical issues must be emphasized with regard to modernism and modernity: 'The plurality of modernity, even in its European context, and the realization that there are other modernisms beyond the European context' (2010: 454).

The attempted erasure of African exemplars from debates about modernist architecture is neither accidental nor mere oversight. While the occlusion of Africa certainly betrays the Eurocentric tendencies of modernism more broadly, it also seems quite consistent with the core aesthetic strategies and ideological sympathies of modernist practice. Modernist architecture, after all, worked through what James Holston calls an 'aesthetic of erasure and reinscription' (1989: 5). A hallmark of modernist design was its interest in portraying itself as emerging *de novo* – an insurgent movement without precedent or past, marking a radical break or rupture with existing architectural styles and social forms. In this respect, modernist architects rejected the idea that they should remain sensitive to cultural context or historical setting; nor did they seek to situate their interventions within the established framework of a sedimented and socially produced landscape. The point, for them, was to clear the ground and to start anew, remaking space and society with a commitment to machine-age innovation and the radical potential of design.

COLONIAL PROJECTS, MODERNIST PLANS

The complete history of African modernism remains to be written, but any initial step in that direction must start with questioning the ground-clearing gestures of modernists themselves, exploring how their work was rooted in a much deeper cultural and social context. First, any discussion of modernism’s impact in diverse African sites must begin with colonialism as its point of departure. More is involved here than temporal coincidence; European colonialism does not simply mark the general epoch during which modernism came to Africa. Indeed, the affinities between modernist design and colonial regimes pre-date international modernism itself – stretching back to the early modern period and the emergence of the Enlightenment, with the roots of rationalist urban planning (Home 1997).

Across Africa, colonial regimes sought to completely transform existing cities or construct them anew. As a ruling strategy, colonialism either denied or denigrated indigenous history and culture, recasting African societies as Europe’s antithesis, in need of the ‘civilizing mission’. Accommodation was irrelevant; African cultures were cast as behind or backward. ‘Tradition’ needed to be razed, or as colonialism progressed, conserved in ‘native locations’ or reserves (casbahs, medinas, or old towns) as museum pieces where the quaint could continue, frozen outside the main currents of modern urban life. This approach was pronounced in French North Africa, where *villes nouvelles* were laid out adjacent to older urban sites, serving as models of the modern in contrast to enframed and static preserves of the past (Wright 1991).

One can find numerous points of agreement between the modernist critique of existing nineteenth-century cities and European colonial attitudes toward African cityscapes. As Le Corbusier declared:

The centers of our towns are in a state of mortal sickness, their boundaries gnawed at as though by vermin. The centers of our great cities must be pulled down and rebuilt, and [...] the wretched existing belts of suburbs must be abolished and carried further out.

(1929: 96)

Rather than seeking to grasp the sociocultural logic of indigenous spatial forms, colonial administrators objected to what they saw as the irrationality of existing cities. They deplored the lack of straight lines, regular forms, or abstract grids – as if the perceived lack of formal geometry was tantamount to the absence of form itself (Scott 1998). When urban landscapes did not conform to their Enlightenment ideals, planners saw disorder and equated it with dysfunction and disease – defects that comprehensive and rational planning would eradicate (Bissell 2011). With unquestioning faith in the power of sociospatial engineering, colonial regimes committed considerable resources to constructing planned environments on rational lines. Following the initial grid plan for Dakar in the 1850s, one would be hard pressed to locate any African city that was not subject to numerous attempts at master planning. From Cape Town to Casablanca plans assumed different forms at different moments; despite this diversity, core features that are clearly modernist in scope persist.

First came the idea of breaking the city down into component parts and reconstituting it along functional lines through zoning. Second, this functional separation would render the city a more efficient mechanism, reducing the hybrid and overlapping uses of space, and streamlining the urban economy by linking cities as productive engines to global markets. In the colonial milieu, zoning arose in the context of racist and segregationist ideologies, seeking to separate rulers and ruled, Europeans and natives, colonizers and colonized, white and black – often driven by notions of racial purity, hygiene, health, and fears of cultural contamination. Zoning was never just an economizing or rationalizing tool, but also a crude instrument of power, premised on the technopolitics of control. Third, as the emphasis on production lines and efficiency indicates, the modern African city was to be remade for the machine age – highlighting speed, auto-mobility, and mass production. Technology would separate work and residence, leisure and administration, with clear axes of difference and arterial connections between them.

‘We claim, in the name of the steamship, the airplane, and the automobile, the right to health, logic, daring, harmony, and perfection’, declared Le Corbusier (qtd. in Scott 1998: 107). The right to logic and perfection, however, was far easier to assert than to achieve. Modernist ideals of planning often remained little more than projections on paper, as did many colonial master plans. For all Le Corbusier’s hubris, most of his work remained unrealized – including the seven plans he drew up for Algiers alone in the 1930s and early 1940s. If the colonies were seen as ‘laboratories for modernism’, to use Lyautey and Prost’s apt formulation from their pioneering work in Morocco (Wright 2001: 226; see also Rabinow 1989), it is crucial to note that many of these experiments failed. This was partly a result of sheer ambition, as well as the high social, political, and material costs of master planning. The more comprehensive the plan was, the greater the expense and complications in carrying it out. The lack of serious regard for existing cultural forms, social worlds, and historical precedents also came back to haunt planners, offering obstacles and opportunities for Africans to subvert their designs. Modernist plans were often undermined by their own pathologies of power – not least the sort of blind faith placed in the architect/planner as totalizing expert. In the colonial milieu, planning was never remotely participatory, but imposed from above; this top-down, technocratic approach was all too well suited to the authoritarian tendencies of modernist planning, which left most plans without any viable social base.

In terms of technology as a cultural instrument, colonialism itself was motivated by ‘a grand modernist project of infrastructure’ (Larkin 2008: 243). Connecting subjects within a territory by roads or radios, hooking them up to the electric grid or connecting them by mobile cinemas were simultaneously political, cultural, and technical projects; by providing infrastructure, the state projected its power, deploying technology to address the people as colonial subjects and consumers of modern ‘goods’. Of course, signals are not always received while the electricity cuts out, or the grid never extends beyond narrow preserves. The grand project of infrastructure, much like modernism itself, was always incomplete even as it affected everyday urban lives and aspirations in unexpected ways.

MIXED MODERNISM: VERNACULAR APPROPRIATIONS

Beyond urban planning, modernism insinuated itself into the built fabric of colonial African cities at the level of individual sites, even as African forms influenced conceptions of modernism in Europe. Design influences flowed in both directions, inspired by creative hybridizations. Across British, French, Belgian, or Italian empires, ‘questions of syncretism in colonial architecture – whether to practice it, how to practice it, how to justify it, and what to name it – gave definition to all national colonial architectures in the modern era’ (Fuller 2007: 111). Of course, these exchanges could be highly selective. In Ethiopia, Italian architects regarded Addis Ababa as a blank slate to redraw, with no indigenous structures worth retaining, while Tripoli was praised – even as it was strategically recast. In North Africa, Arab houses were not considered ‘Arab’, but re-designated as ‘Roman’ or ‘Mediterranean’. European architects could thus appropriate African styles without being accused of imitating their colonial subjects. As Luigi Piccinato, the designer of a model colonial house at the 1933 Triennial Exhibition of Milan, elaborated, ‘the local architecture on the African coasts is, in character, not so much Arab as it is *Mediterranean* [...] an architecture of masses, white and luminous, simple, closed to the outside, rich in volumes and poor in decoration’ (qtd. in Fuller 2007: 118). The hybrid African, Indian, and Arab architectural vocabulary of the Swahili coast, perhaps most extensively realized in Zanzibar’s Mji Mkongwe, can be described in similarly modernist terms: cubist, modular, and highly adaptable, creating a dense and aesthetically complex urban landscape of masses and volumes.

Similarly, Morocco and Algeria strongly influenced French modernism. In 1938, Édouard Sarrat flatly declared, ‘modern architecture, which is characterized by a sort of return to antiquity through bare plans and arrangements of volumes, is better suited to Morocco than to the Paris skyline’. Henri Deschamps agreed: ‘the international modern style is eminently suited to Morocco, perhaps even more so than to its country of origins’ (both qtd. in Cohen and Eleb 2002: 212). Moreover, in colonial settings such as Asmara, where Italian architects were active in the 1940s, modernist interventions were extensive enough (and still extant) to justify calling it a ‘secret modernist city’ (Denison *et al.* 2003). Likewise, Hassan Fathy’s celebrated plan for New Gournā (1973) used vernacular indigenous architecture as a repository of ‘authentic’ forms to fashion a renewed cultural identity resistant to Western technological prowess. His designs for the rural poor reconceptualized vernacular traditions, seeing Egyptian rural housing as anticipating and articulating well with modernist architectural vocabularies (Çelik 1998: 207).

LATE COLONIAL INTERNATIONAL STYLE MODERNISM

By the mid twentieth century, the international style of modernist architecture was no longer an insurgent movement, but instead the dominant transnational norm. Modernism, if anything, found a more receptive audience in the late colonial world than within Europe. As anticolonial movements gained steam, colonial regimes were indicted for their hypocrisy and bad faith. How could Europe pretend to represent a ‘higher’ civilization, when it had plunged the world into the Second World War and the Holocaust? How could European regimes claim to represent progress, when they

were repressing Africans, exploiting them, and denying their democratic aspirations? As Aimé Césaire argued,

at present, it is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them; [...] it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score; [...] it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back.

(1994: 179)

Demands for national self-determination went hand-in-hand with protests about the lack of investment in infrastructure and social development – schools, hospitals, public housing, high-rise buildings. Even as mass African publics mobilized against European control, they did not reject modernization so much as seek to turn it to their own ends.

In this late colonial context, modernist design became part of the vocabulary shaping new African cityscapes. Initially these mid-century interventions were designated ‘tropical architecture’. Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew called attention to them in the 1950s, though they were already being practised by indigenous architects such as Anthony B. Almeida in Tanzania: ‘Modern architecture has above all this task of interpreting applied science in humanistic terms. Of making industrialism fit for human use; building cities that ennoble life instead of degrading and destroying it’ (Fry and Drew 1956: 20). Tropical architecture seems canonically modernist in spirit, but also combines a sensitivity to climate, materials, site, and environmental factors, taking us closer to more recent concerns with sustainability. It was institutionalized in educational settings (the University College in Ibadan, Nigeria, or Kumasi College of Technology, in Ghana), government structures, or commercial buildings, but also found its way into new interpretations of the colonial bungalow – as in the prefabricated ‘maison tropicale,’ designed by Jean Prouvé for Brazzaville, later ‘retrieved’ and installed in the Centre Pompidou in Paris (Prouvé 2009).

ARCHITECTURE FOR THE NEW AGE: POST-COLONIAL ASPIRATIONS

Even as European colonialism was swept aside by mass movements premised on African national self-determination, modernist design remained the dominant idiom of the new post-colonial age. ‘Only a few years ago,’ wrote Udo Kultermann in 1963, ‘it would hardly have been a worthwhile task to attempt to make a survey of the modern buildings scattered throughout Africa’ – but as his work in the 1960s then went on to document, a wide and aesthetically rich array of modernist structures was rapidly being constructed across newly independent Africa (Kultermann 1963, 1969). As Nnamdi Elleh notes, the first generation of African architects called upon to build the post-colonial nation ‘actually trained in the United States and Europe, and they were fascinated by modernist architecture’ (2001: 237). Modernist design spoke in the international language of the post-Bandung moment, favoured across the non-aligned and developing world from Indonesia to India (Chandigarh), Pakistan (Islamabad), and Brazil (Brasilia). It appealed to technocrats and post-colonial elites,

and despite its complicity with elite power, still retained a progressive charge linked to egalitarian ideals and goals of transforming society through spatial engineering.

Independent African states faced the enormous challenge of overcoming decades of colonial underdevelopment and lack of social welfare investment, even as they confronted pent-up demand for social services from rapidly growing populations. The challenge to industrialize and develop was even more acute insofar as these nascent states also had to consolidate their territorial hold, maintain political order, provide education, health care, and infrastructure to citizens, and forge new unifying national cultures among extremely heterogeneous populations – all in the context of Cold War machinations that made the continent a covert battleground and reinforced authoritarian trends.

Unifying symbols and commemorative sites were designed to mark the new nations, with modern facilities for a new African age. The idiom they invariably used was modernist, from airports to parliament buildings, national libraries, stadiums and high-rise offices. As the Tanzanian scholar and activist Haroub Othman explains,

The struggle for independence was not just against the white colonialists. It was a struggle for the democratic transformation of our societies. Of course, we wanted to get rid of colonialism, we wanted to rule ourselves, and to be masters of our own destiny. But in that destiny what we envisaged is that we would be able to have good schools, good dispensaries, and hospitals. And that we would be able to transform not only the physical structure of our country, but also be able to transform the person himself, the new man, the new woman.

(qtd. in den Hollander 2007)

New political forms required different architectural spaces and infrastructure; constructing the nation would bring forth uniquely African and modern citizens ready to inhabit these sites. Post-colonial aspirations for total social transformation, however, were often compromised by modernism's downside: the uncritical embrace of modernization, a blind faith in technocratic solutions, and a tendency to revert to autocratic power. Utopian dreams of progressive social change were one side of the coin, but modernist projects could also reproduce or echo colonial spatial processes, reduced to top-down, authoritarian programmes of social engineering driven by external 'experts'.

In Zanzibar, for instance, the first revolutionary president, Abeid Karume, sought to reconstruct and Africanize the city – as well as promote a series of modernist 'New Towns'. He sought to eradicate 'mud huts' as legacies of the colonial past in his massive reconstruction of Ng'ambo, the colonial city's 'other side'. As Karume declared:

After all, a mud hut, however well constructed, cannot possibly compare with a modern flat. I personally had twelve such huts, and they have all been demolished. The purpose is to provide each family with a flat, for a person who lives in a miserable ramshackle hut rather than a modern flat cannot truly be said to be free.

(1969: 4–6).

Large-scale modernist blocks of flats indistinguishable from international public housing estates – and designed and overseen by East German advisers – arose in Michenzani, Kikwajuni, and Kilimani. But 'freedom' was hardly the result: those

whose homes were razed had little say in the matter, and construction depended on compulsory labour. Moreover, 80 per cent of the structures destroyed to make way for the flats were in good or fair condition, and could hardly be described as slum dwellings or ramshackle huts (Myers 1993: 372). The new housing also conflicted with local notions of proper domestic space and neighbourhood form, striking many residents as alien or dysfunctional.



Figure 17.1 Socialist New Towns on the Grid: two (out of ten total) East German-designed blocks of modernist flats, Michenzani, Zanzibar, late 1960s–1970s.



Figure 17.2 Tropical modern: public housing at Kilimani, Zanzibar, with market banda (shed or workshop) at lower left, 1967–71.

MODERNIST PLANNING REDUX: MAKING POST-COLONIAL CAPITALS

Modernist urban planning was also renewed with the new post-colonial states, most directly in ambitious designs for new capital cities. A few, as with the move from Zomba to Lilongwe in Malawi, involved re-designating existing smaller cities as new political capitals. More typically, these initiatives involved starting all over again, constructing new centres – as with Dodoma in Tanzania, Abuja in Nigeria, or Yamoussoukro in Ivory Coast. These planned cities were motivated by different aims, but shared features that were distinctly modernist in spirit. Existing capitals such as Dar es Salaam or Lagos were cast as colonial remnants, situated on the coast and linked to an economy directed toward Europe. They were seen as chaotic, unplanned, and structured by exclusions or inequalities (racial segregation, uneven access to services, economic injustice). Political leaders were attracted by the idea of starting afresh by constructing new capitals – sites that could be centrally planned and politically controlled. They drew on exemplars from Washington, DC to Brasilia and Le Corbusier's 'City of Three Million Inhabitants' (Elleh 2001; Çelik 1998). The new capitals were typically sited centrally, symbolizing a radial point that could serve to unify the nation, knitting together dispersed ethnic groups and interests. Much of their architecture was modernist, with sculptural forms isolated in green-space, monumental axes, and complexes of structures arranged around national malls (parliament, high court, presidential palace).

MODERNIST RUINS? OF MEMORY AND MONUMENTS

In *Avenue Patrice Lumumba*, Guy Tillim (2008) documents the abandoned spaces that modernism left behind in central Africa: toppled statues, empty playgrounds, broad avenues, the stark lines of high-rise structures and housing estates:

These photographs are not collapsed histories of post-colonial African states or a meditation of late-modernist-era colonial structures, but a walk through avenues of dreams. Patrice Lumumba's dream, his nationalism, is discernable in the structures, if one reads certain clues, as is the death of his dream, in these de facto monuments. How strange that modernism, which eschewed monument and past for nature and future, should carry such memory so well.

(2008, n.p.)

Tillim remarks on the 'strange and beautiful hybrid landscape' that modernism has left behind in its wake, finding there an 'indisputably African identity' (2008, n.p.).

Of course, modernism was never as singular as it claimed, and this post-colonial embrace of hybridity, cultural fusion, and intermixture can be understood as part of its enduring legacy – even if it represents a route that was never fully explored. In the early 1960s, Amancio d'Alpoim Guedes described his goals for his 'yes house' in Mozambique – part administration building, part caretaker's flat, attached to an old factory:

I wanted to do a stark, humble, ugly, smiling sort of building, marked with gigantic black signs and pretty letters. I wanted to do a building that would

survive being dirty – streaked, stained, altered, soiled by time and the passage of people – a building dented by bullets, with chickens scratching in the backyard.
(qtd. in Donat 1964: 104)

In retrospect, this embrace of the everyday, of ordinary landscapes, of contradiction, creative exchange, and the patina created by wear and tear, dirt, and daily use seems prophetic. Fifty years after independence, modernist interventions in many African cities have faded into the established landscape of the built environment, more suited to preservation than representing future possibilities.

In 1948, Abidjan's population was 58,000; Dar es Salaam's was 51,000 (Newell 2012; Leslie 1963). Today their populations are around four million each, according to UN Habitat (2010). With similar rates of growth in other African megacities – combined with state retrenchment, neoliberal capitalism, and external 'enclave' investment – modernist structures and designs have been largely rendered irrelevant. Under the same pressures, modernist planning has been largely abandoned, and urban growth has been driven by unregulated settlements – precisely the sort of slums and *bidonvilles* that modernism sought to replace. In Tanzania, the architect Daniel Mbisso praised the 'early modernist principles' of Bedu Amuli (designer of Kariakoo market) and Anthony Almeida, but said their time was already past – much as their landmark structures are increasingly threatened by redevelopment as transnational corporate towers take over the central city. In Dar, Mbisso observed, 'we have a new version of modernism, where the issue of minimalistic thinking is not there anymore'. In the new Tanzania, he continued, 'it is capital that determines what should be built and what should be placed in the city' (qtd. in den Hollander 2007) – a development that comes with ominous implications for urban sustainability, social equality, and the capacity to imagine more positive urban futures. Perhaps this is modernism's most dystopian legacy – not just its failure to deliver on its social promises, but its demise as a dream of a better world.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DEFINING AFRO-MODERNISM

African cinema's response to modernity



Lizelle Bisschoff

Africa's encounter with modernity differed from Western experiences, and manifestations of modernism thus developed along different trajectories on the African continent than in other parts of the world, in particular in Europe. It is problematic to view modernism as a purely Western construct, as any application of modernism on African artistic and aesthetic practice would then indicate a Eurocentric approach to understanding this time period in Africa, a foreign construct forcefully applied to a continent with its own very specific historiographies.

Africa likewise has had a contentious and complex historical encounter and relationship with modernity, as modernity came to Africa via the brutality of colonization, but modern thought also eventually led to the end of colonization and to independence. With the advent of independence Africans were free from previous oppressive structures, which also led to new forms of creative expression, including in filmmaking. But as Araeen claims, the Western import of ideas of modernity, along with the means and expertise of modernization, created a fundamental problem and philosophical paradox for post-colonial Africa in creating its own modern worldview and cultural production (2005: 411). Artistic expression requires an ability to freely imagine, innovate, and create, and if the dominant sociocultural milieu of a society does not represent its own unique values, but is instead based on something imposed from the outside, it is hard for the artist to escape this continuing cultural and economic imperialism. For Araeen the main problem of modernism in Africa is that it suffers from a dependency syndrome, which leaves the artist in a constant struggle to catch up with whatever is happening in the West (2005: 412). Africa has indeed entered the modern world, but its history of being colonized and oppressed means that it has not entered modernity on its own terms.

One response is to reject a Eurocentric understanding of modernism. Indeed, some critics argue that the modernism of Western Europe should be linked to a history of global modernism(s), in which Africa, Asia, and other parts of the non-Western world have been active and critical participants. Sylvester Ogbechie claims that the re-emergence of debates about the nature and parameters of modernism suggests that postmodernism's rejection of the modernist project failed to explain how cultures classified as 'other' in Western discourses engaged the larger context of modernism

(2008: 1). This broader view of modernism points towards the notion of alternative modernities or modernisms. This approach opens a space for alternative art historical narratives to emerge, including that of modern African art, which argue against the reception of non-Western contexts as secondary locations for manifestations of a European ethos and ideology.

There is another layer to the relationship between modernism and the African continent, in that early modernist artists looked to traditional African art, which was primarily viewed as ‘primitive’, as inspiration for their work. Picasso’s proto-cubism was strongly influenced by traditional African sculpture, and alongside Matisse he had a major influence on the School of Paris painting styles of the time which appropriated the highly stylized representation of the human figure in African sculptures. It was of course due to the colonial conquest of Africa at the end of the nineteenth century that thousands of traditional African art works were raided from the continent and ended up in European museums, where artists such as Picasso and Matisse first encountered them. Despite the Eurocentric view of early modernism of African art as traditional and primitive, the post-independence era of the 1960s also saw the emergence of African modernist artists, some of whom trained in Europe and returned to Africa after independence to utilize their training in European modernism in depicting their African worldviews and perspectives. Senegalese artist Iba N’Diaye, for instance, founded the École de Dakar on his return from France after independence, an artistic genre which drew inspiration from the literary movement of Négritude. Négritude underscored pan-Africanism and a common black identity in rejecting colonialism and racism, and the École de Dakar likewise attempted to assert a distinctly African voice in the arts, free from the traditions of the colonizing nations.

Locating modernism in Africa then is a complex challenge, and critics such as cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah point out the problems inherent in defining modern African art as ‘modernist’ and measuring it according to the parameters of European modernism, which would entail the Eurocentric approach I refer to above. In his essay entitled ‘Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?’ Appiah claims that to understand modernity we must first reject the rationalization of the world as a dominant Western historical discourse (1991: 343–44). He argues that the modernist characterization of modernity must be challenged, and he thus rejects modernism as a suitable concept to use in an African context. Appiah further rejects modernism’s judgement of ‘primitive art’ (including traditional African art) according to supposedly universal aesthetic criteria, which then gave value to these art works (1991: 347). By contrast, postmodernisms – and his use of the plural here indicates his view that postmodernism has a multiplicity which can free modern and traditional art from the stranglehold of a singular Eurocentric modernism – cannot see African art as legitimized by standards that transcend culture and history. However, before we reject the application of modernism to Africa altogether, in the next section I attempt to trace examples of modernist film in Africa. During the search, I make pit stops at areas such as neorealism, new wave, political modernism, third cinema, *cinéma vérité*, and vernacular modernism in the quest to formulate a nuanced understanding of the relationship between African film and modernism.

SEARCHING FOR MODERNIST AFRICAN FILMS

I take a broad overview of the development of filmmaking in Sub-Saharan Africa with some snapshots of films and filmmakers intended to be viewed as specific case studies to illuminate the discussion. This approach is not intended to flatten the immense diversity and heterogeneity of Africa into a monolithic construct, but instead to emphasize this diversity.

Filmmaking in Sub-Saharan Africa by Africans is a decidedly post-colonial endeavour, which emerged only after African countries gained their independence from France, Britain, Portugal, and Belgium, from the late 1950s/early 1960s onwards. Africans were of course introduced to cinema long before then, in fact shortly after the invention of the medium at the end of the nineteenth century. In Africa, cinema was at the forefront of the construction of a modernity that incorporated colonialism's tenets of racism, domination, and imperialism (Bakari 2007: 501). Being aware of the immense propagandistic and ideological power of the moving image, the colonial powers suppressed filmmaking activity by Africans during colonization and in some cases invented policies and instruments to control what Africans could watch (e.g. Britain's Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment). Cinema as modern entertainment became intertwined with the politics of colonization and colonial society. Indeed, if technology is one of the main markers of modernity, the development of cinema is closely linked to the development of modernity.

Francophone West Africa is generally regarded as the birthplace of indigenous filmmaking in Sub-Saharan Africa. Manthia Diawara states that in the period from after independence into the 1990s, as much as 80 per cent of black African films were made by filmmakers from Francophone Africa (1992: 21).¹ While only very few early directors from Anglophone and Lusophone Africa became internationally known, Francophone West Africa can lay claim to a great many important pioneering directors, including the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene, Oumarou Ganda from Niger, Dikongue Pipa from Cameroon, Djibril Diop Mambety and Safi Faye from Senegal, Med Hondo from Mauritania, and Souleymane Cissé from Mali. France's involvement in developing the communication industries, including filmmaking, in its former colonies was of course cultural as well as political, and seemingly came as a counter to the policies which reigned during colonization. While Africans were prohibited to make films on the continent during colonization, shortly after independence France implemented institutions intended to support the development of film industries in the newly independent African countries. Also of significance was the presence of French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch in West Africa, who worked in Niger and Ivory Coast in the 1950s, employing African actors as assistants and training some of the pioneers of Francophone West African cinema, including Oumarou Ganda and Moustapha Alassane, both from Niger.

Indigenous filmmaking in Sub-Saharan Africa emerged and developed during the period of modernist filmmaking in Europe. Kovács states that cinema in the 1960s found itself in a prominent cultural position within Western culture, with filmmakers considering themselves as the eminent representatives of this culture (2007: 1). But he also emphasizes the international manifestations of modernism in film, and it is indeed possible to trace modernist influences in African cinema during modernism's heyday in European cinema between 1950 and 1980. Some of the pioneers of Sub-

Saharan African cinema, including Ousmane Sembene, Soulymane Cissé, and Sarah Maldoror (who was from Guadeloupe but was married to one of the leaders of the Angolan liberation struggle and lived and worked in Angola) received bursaries to study film in Moscow (indicative of the ex-Soviet Union's support of the liberation struggles in Africa). These filmmakers almost certainly came in contact with European cinema, as well as Russian filmmaking, and they were thus acquainted with the modernist film movements and influences of Italian neorealism, French new wave, and Russian montage. This is not to say that these directors readily adopted modernist filmmaking approaches in their own work – though as we will see below, parallels and influences can be traced – but a common denominator of their work is their clear political engagement with film. This commitment to a cause was underscored by the continent-wide inauguration of the Federation of Pan-African Filmmakers (FEPACI) in 1969, which stressed the importance of African ownership of the means of expression and control of production and distribution, and emphasized a political approach to filmmaking that would work against cultural imperialism and the political and economic oppression of Africa, not only against the legacy of colonialism, but also against neo-colonialism in the post-independence era.

Searching for manifestations of modernism in African cinema requires recognition of the aesthetic *and* the political traits of modernist filmmaking, a focus on form as well as content. Under the political filmmaking climate such as espoused by FEPACI, Ousmane Sembene emerged as a resolutely Marxist and politically committed filmmaker in the 1960s. Having started his career in writing, Sembene moved to filmmaking as he believed the medium could reach wider audiences by overcoming the barriers of illiteracy. Sembene was concerned with social change and his films often highlighted the plight of the poor, marginalized, and dispossessed, in films such as *Borom Sarret* (1963), his first film which focuses on a poor cart driver in Dakar; *La Noire de...* (1966), about the tragic fate and crushed expectations of a Senegalese maid taken to France by a French couple; *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), about the massacre of West African troops by French forces just after the end of the Second World War; and his final film *Moolaadé* (2005), a passionate denouncement of female genital mutilation. He also critiqued neo-colonialism and the corruption of the African bourgeoisie in films such as *Mandabi* (1968) and *Xala* (1975).

Sembene's filmmaking has been described as social realist, and characteristics of his filmmaking style, such as his depictions of the marginalized and destitute, and his preference for non-professional actors, have led to comparisons of his work with Italian neorealism. As in many of Sembene's films, the depiction of social problems as experienced by 'real and ordinary' people form the basis of neorealist filmmaking, in which content often takes precedence over form. This characteristic of Italian neorealist filmmaking has been described by filmmaker Roberto Rossellini as the decision first to take a moral and ethical position from which to look at the world, which *then* becomes an aesthetic position (Overbey 1978: 11). However, to describe Sembene's work solely as social realist and to place his films alongside Italian neorealism in terms of moral positioning is too restrictive in view of, for instance, his use of parody, satire, and symbolism, as has been convincingly argued by critics such as David Murphy (2000). Although Sembene is clearly concerned with the depiction of social reality, he presents alternative visions for social change and betterment which means that his work is didactic and idealist in nature and moves beyond a mere mirroring of societal conditions.

Furthermore, he often employs satire as subversive social criticism, and in this regard his films appear to be more subversive on the level of content than of style. Sembene used film as a political tool, and the politically interventionist nature of his work, whether it concerns state and government power structures, gender, race, or class, is clearly evident throughout his entire oeuvre. Perhaps a comparison with political modernism would be more apt: the defining idea, as Rodowick states, of 1970s film theory regardless of whether commercial, independent or 'third world' cinemas are considered (1998: viii). The relationship between film and ideology advocated by political modernism, and its links with political deconstruction and Marxism, all seem to find traces in Sembene's work.

If Sembene's films have spurred comparisons with Italian neorealism, the work of his compatriot Djibril Diop Mambety has been compared to the youthful spirit and rebelliousness of the French new wave. Mambety was a self-taught artist, actor, composer, and poet, and although he only made a handful of films, his work has gained international recognition for its idiosyncratic and radical experiments with style and his fragmented, non-linear narrative techniques. Like many of the Francophone filmmakers of this era, Mambety used his films to comment on political and social conditions in Africa, while also often centralizing the experiences of those at the margins of society. Mambety's work, however, does not display a similar strong concern with issues of nationalism and defining the characteristics of post-colonial African society as a counter to European modernity; instead, he juxtaposes symbolism and imagery of traditional and modern Africa, as well as contemporary European culture, in provocative and unsettling montage sequences, which he applies visually and aurally. His films such as *Badou Boy* (1970) and *Touki Bouki* (1973) are subversive avant-garde stylistic experiments that display a distinctly modernist urban take on post-colonial Africa, echoing the modernist impulses of European cinema of the 1960s. *Badou Boy*, which follows the disorderly journey of a young male anarchist through Dakar, and *Touki Bouki*, which follows the quest of a disillusioned young Senegalese couple as they plan to leave Dakar for Paris, both feature disoriented and alienated anti-heroes, again similar to the young protagonists encountered in French new wave.

David Murphy and Patrick Williams speculate as to whether Mambety's style is that of a high modernist attempting to impose his artistic vision on a fragmented world, or whether it is a postmodern rejection of any sense of an overriding artistic vision in favour of simply presenting the disintegration of art and reality (2007: 102). They argue that modernism and modernity should not be seen as monolithic (one could add, Eurocentric), but that both had multiple strands, many of which were deeply sceptical of the dehumanizing nature of the capitalist system; this is the aspect of modern, urban, and capitalist culture in which Mambety is interested. Mambety's work thus reflects both the utopian and dystopian nature of modernity, and could be seen as modernist exactly because it embraces the complexities and idiosyncrasies of modern, post-colonial African (Murphy and Williams 2007: 104). Alexander Fisher (2006: 128) critiques the analyses of critics such as Ukadike (1994), and Armes and Malkmus (1991), which emphasize a fracture between Africanist (read traditional) and modernist readings of Mambety's work. Instead, he argues that the non-closure of Mambety's narratives (for example the failure of his two protagonists in *Touki Bouki* to reach Paris) should rather be seen as eroding



Figure 18.1 The eponymous anti-hero of Djibril Diop Mambety's *Badou Boy* (1970), being chased by the ubiquitous policeman. © Teemour Mambéty.



Figure 18.2 Mory and Anta, lovers on the loose in Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki Bouki* (1973). © Teemour Mambéty.

notions of a movement from tradition to modernity, replaced by the idea that modernization affects all cultural formations and is simply organized in a multitude of different ways (Fisher 2006: 133).

The commitment to political expression of the era of early African filmmaking has strong links to the 1960s Latin American movement of third cinema, which denounced neo-colonialism and capitalism, and set itself up against the commercialism of Hollywood (first cinema) and the individualism and focus on the auteur of European arthouse cinema (second cinema). Indeed, the priorities of FEPACI chime strongly with the proclamations of third cinema which declared collective revolutionary activism through film. Third cinema and European modernism are not mutually exclusive, as Kinsman describes different historically specific countercinemas of modernism (as opposed to the ahistoricity of political modernism) which have affinities with third cinema (2007: 57). Kinsman cites Paul Willemsen's view that the international rise of third cinema has made the familiar realism vs. modernism or postmodernism debates simply irrelevant (2007: 58–9), but he also emphasizes that abandoning the central theoretical tenet of political modernism does not mean abandoning either politics or formal innovation. The significance of Willemsen's interpretation of third cinema is the international applicability of the term to politically minded, socially critical films. We find the combination of the political commitment of third cinema with stylistic innovation – a kind of modernist political aesthetics perhaps – in the work of other African filmmakers beyond Mambety, such as Mauritanian director Med Hondo, in particular in his experimental anti-colonial masterpiece *Soleil O* (1967), and expat Ethiopian director Haile Gerima, in his films such as *Harvest 3000 Years* (1976) and *Sankofa* (1993), which both deal with the history of slavery.

Finally, the role of Jean Rouch in the development of African cinema makes a consideration of *cinéma vérité* appropriate. Rouch influenced the work of female Senegalese filmmaker Safi Faye in particular, who acted in his films before she started her directorial career as an ethnographic filmmaker. According to Kovács *cinéma vérité* originated from a fundamentally anthropological approach, which focused on the psychological universe of the film's subject (2007: 171). He sees this approach as more personal and subjective than neorealism, where the context of the stories reflects individuals' relationships with their environments, and an awareness of the filmed situation. Safi Faye's work could be categorized as such, as her films are close-up studies of African cultural, political, and economic life, often set in rural Africa, and combining elements of fiction and documentary styles. She often set her films in the community that she is from, the Serer peasants of Senegal, in films such as *Kaddu Beykat* (1975) and *Fad'jal* (1979). She thus acquires an insider's perspective in her films, as evinced by her subjects' easy trust and confidence in her. Crucially, her work also displays a feminist approach as she grapples with gender issues and the role of women in African societies. As in Faye's work, the subjects of *cinéma vérité* are considered primarily as unique individuals rather than as social types (as is often the case in Sembene's films, for example), and there is a constant interaction between the subject and the filmmaker, which, according to Kovács, makes *cinéma vérité* a genuinely modernist invention (2007: 171).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN AFRO-MODERNIST DEFINITION OF AFRICAN FILM AND BEYOND

The pioneering and early filmmakers of Sub-Saharan Africa often embraced experimental, transgressive, and subversive narrative forms congruent with modernist approaches to filmmaking, especially in their attempts to denounce colonialism and interrogate the identity of the modern African subject of post-colonial Africa. Murphy and Williams (2007: 103) state that anticolonial African cultural production was inspired by a desire to create both an African modernity – embracing the post-colonial, democratic, modern, industrialized nation-state, and an African artistic modernism, developing the artistic forms to represent this African modernity. Just as European modernism was a response to Europe's ambiguous encounter with modernity, so was the cultural production of post-independence Sub-Saharan Africa a response to the complex and often ambivalent post-colonial situation, in which the optimism of early nationalism soon seemed to be crushed in the face of new political, cultural, and economic challenges.

Referring back to the earlier critique of the Eurocentrism of modernism, the question remains whether modernism is an appropriate term to use in an African context and in particular to understand the development of African filmmaking from the 1950s onwards. I would argue affirmatively, as it aids an understanding of the development of African film in a global context and resists the ghettoization of African cinema. I would argue for an Afro-modernist approach which takes into account historical, cultural, and aesthetic specificity and distinction, and which avoids generalizations. Miriam Hansen calls this approach vernacular modernism, as she claims that the postmodernist challenge to modernism and modernity at large opened up a space for understanding modernism as a much wider, more diverse phenomenon, avoiding a singular genealogy (1999: 59). Such a view also sees modernism as more than sets of ideas and artistic styles, but as a whole range of cultural and artistic practices.

While modernist impulses could be observed in Sub-Saharan African cinema of the 1950s to 1970s, African cinema started to diversify more and more from the 1980s onwards. Over the last two decades we also find the emergence of strong filmmaking industries in previously underrepresented countries and regions such as Anglophone West Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa. If we concede that most African filmmakers never consciously embraced modernist filmmaking, it would subsequently be wrong to claim that modernism has now been abandoned. But if we view modernism rather as an artistic and political response to the complexities and ambiguities of modernity, then we can still find modernist impulses in contemporary African filmmaking: in the expressionist and meditative films of Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako; the experimental narratives and metafilmic techniques of Cameroonian director Jean-Pierre Bekolo; and the interstitial and accented characterization in French/Senegalese director Alain Gomis's work, for example. African filmmakers continue to explore the diverse experiences of African modernity through their work.

NOTE

1. This is also the reason why this discussion is dominated by Francophone West Africa. Even though South Africa has the second oldest film industry on the continent (after Egypt), it is virtually impossible to find examples of modernist filmmaking in early South African cinema; the oppressive apartheid policies isolated the country and suppressed creativity which resulted in the majority of early South African cinema being nationalist or escapist propaganda. Since the end of apartheid filmmaking has expanded and diversified tremendously.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

MODERNISM AND AFRICAN DANCE

Reinventing traditions



Kariamun Welsh

In this essay, I address the role of African dances as cultural ambassadors for burgeoning and newly liberated African nations. Liberation was thematic in the modernist discourse in post-Second World War Europe and America. The Allies had won and the troops were coming home. For the many Africans and African-Americans who fought in the Second World War, the question of liberation became more urgent. Modernism, for the disenfranchised, was a catalyst for self-invention and self-development. Liberation meant freedom from colonialism, and the wheels were put in motion as scores of educated African activists set their sights on the liberation of their countries. African activists knew that the next war was their war of liberation and freedom.

In the 1950s, African dance companies served as cultural ambassadors for newly independent African countries and thus ushered in a wave of African dance to Europe and the West. For the next 30 years, as colonized African countries became nation-states, companies such as Les Ballets Africains of Guinea and Le Ballet National Du Sénégal toured abroad, bringing specific cultures to the world stage as a means to counter racist, exoticized, and primitivist Western views – views that had been cultivated over time through colonialism and ersatz presentations of African cultures, particularly at international exhibitions such as the World's Fairs and the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* of 1931. Many of these 1950s companies were short-lived, but they left a lasting legacy. The National Dance Company movement arose out of a desire for newly independent countries to showcase their cultures and to place their dances in the arena of world arts. Dance companies burgeoned in West Africa following independence from the late 1950s through the 1960s, including the establishment of the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), Le Ballet National du Sénégal, and Les Ballets Africains of Guinea. These companies, among others, played major roles in spreading African music and dances across ethnic and international boundaries. These intercultural exchanges and the growth of folklore troupes derived from the policies set forth by newly elected African leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, and Sékou Touré of Guinea.



Figure 19.1 Les Ballets Africains. Photo: Matthew Mueller.

According to Frantz Fanon, national cultures are inescapably politicized:

A national culture is not folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in under-developed countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom, which these countries are carrying on.

(1990: 188)

Such was the task set out for Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of independent Senegal, and Fodéba Keïta, the first minister of the interior in independent Guinea. These two men supported the earliest proponents of the National Dance Company movement. Senghor established a lively, well-supported cultural system complete with art schools, a national museum, festivals, and touring exhibitions. Keïta was a Guinean who studied in Paris and produced several shows in Europe before returning to Guinea after independence. Senghor and Keïta both were part of the young, bright African intelligentsia who sought liberation for their respective countries.

Senghor and Keïta understood the role the arts could play in changing attitudes about Africa. They wanted to present to the world African cultures that would represent the greatness and diversity of ethnic groups and regions within their countries. Within each country, tribal consciousness was pervasive and enduring, but

a national consciousness was needed to enable and empower these new nation-states to self-govern and self-actualize. Thus, national culture had to be constructed and presented to the constituents of each newly formed country as progress to achieve that vision.

Keïta interpreted modernist aesthetics by using an African dance movement vocabulary that displayed the best of his culture. Before the independence of Guinea in 1958, Keïta had already created a dance company, The African Theater Ballet, in France (Watson 2008). The company's name was changed in 1954 to Les Ballets Africains de Keïta Fodeba. When Guinea became independent in 1958, Keïta officially declared Les Ballets Africains a gift to Guinea (Watson 2008). Speaking about Les Ballets Africains, Watson said,

The ballets were effective in creating a strong national identity that integrated elements of different ethnic dance forms in a way that established uniformity and provided a criterion or standard of African theater performance that has served as a model for all of Africa.

(2008: 538)

Keïta's attention to cultural paradigms was in direct response to the primitivism and eroticism of African dance he had seen in Europe. Authenticity became a value and concern as it separated the intentions of the choreographers or promoters of African dance during this period. Many of the early proponents of African dance focused on the dances that portrayed a national identity. They studied abroad and embraced the modern movements and methods, to which they also responded, without compromising their individuality or the collective cause.

African dance became more widely known as a form of concert dance in the 1950s and 1960s with the filming and world tours of Les Ballets Africains under Keïta's leadership. The 'national ballet' movement, in which a number of drumming/dancing companies have adapted traditional African drumming/dancing events to the Western-style stage, has resulted in a surge of interest in African drumming, especially djembe, from the 1970s until the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Culture was the principal route that Senghor used to come to terms with himself as a Black African and a French-trained intellectual in order to fulfill his mission in life (Vaillant 1990).¹ Senghor saw culture as a vehicle to further a nationalist agenda and to correct global misconceptions. For Senghor, culture became an ideological tool to be refashioned in modernist terms to address preconceived notions that Africans did not have their own distinct cultures or that their cultures were backwards and uncivilized. Senghor wanted to offset the exotic imprint that had been stamped on the dances of Africa, for, whether used to critique Western culture or to uphold it as the more 'civilized', these 'exotic fantasies entail[ed] a contrast of, and hierarchy between, two different cultures, controlled by the Western point of view' (Knellwolf 2008: 47). Senghor was impressed with the work that Keïta did in establishing and directing Les Ballets Africains. Le Ballet National Du Sénégal was supported by Senghor (Castaldi 2006). The Ballet epitomized the preservation of cultural heritage. Established within a year of Senegal's independence in 1961, the company drew the most talented dancers from different ethnic groups and regions, thus fostering a sense of national cultural unity (Snipe 1998: 45).

Dance academies – like *Mudra Afrique* in Dakar, Senegal, started in 1977 by then-President Senghor and French choreographer Maurice Béjart – were examples of the best that Africa could offer. They were a manifestation of the *négritude* movement and made formative contributions by providing exposure for African modernist dance as a means to further the belief that culture was the foundation to rebuilding post-independence nations, and that artists contributed in a valuable way to giving expression to the new consciousness of a nation.

From 1947–61, during the latter part of the modernist period in African dance, the Western stage did not accommodate the vicissitudes of an authentic ceremony. The unpredictability of a ceremonial dance had to be stabilized by companies touring to Western stages. The dances had to be timed; there needed to be a finite number of performers on stage; the music became more of an accompaniment for the dances unless the music was featured alone on the programme; dances that would never be performed in the same arena shared space on the programme; and the virtuosic parts of the dances were isolated and collapsed to form five, ten, or 15-minute routines. All of these changes were made to fulfill a new nationalist agenda that promoted unity and a public face that spoke to artistic excellence as influenced by Western values.

Dances were similarly costumed to accommodate Western expectations. That is, costumes were no longer functional or representative of their traditional contexts. For instance, audiences in New York were outraged, titillated, and enthralled when the female performers of *Les Ballets Africains* danced with their women bare-breasted. Where the dancers saw only bare-breasted dancing, the American audience saw topless dancing, with its obligatory whiff of the salacious and sexual. John Lindsey, the mayor of New York at the time, had to intervene and allow the troupe to continue to perform. In traditional African societies, women were fully clothed if their genitals were covered. The breasts were viewed as a functional part of the body, necessary for the very life of the community. In the traditional sense, the performers did not consider themselves nude. Christianity and missionaries had already made their mark in Africa, and many Africans – particularly those in towns and cities – were Christians. Therefore, African artistic directors probably knew that presenting the women bare-breasted would be controversial, and they also knew from a Christian or Muslim perspective that women dancing bare-breasted on the concert stage was taboo in the West, as it was in most parts of Africa. But they were also children of mothers who lovingly raised them in the traditional manner of breastfeeding, or they knew of aunts or grandmothers who did the same. Perhaps this was a calculated move to stir more interest in the show, or perhaps it was an attempt to show, in part, some authentic aspect of African life. The practice of dancing bare-breasted was gradually discontinued even though there would be other controversies (such as animal sacrifice) that would mortify Western audiences and later be stopped.

One of Africa's post-independence mandates was to demonstrate to the world that African countries had cultural forms that could rival Europe's, and the National Dance Company was created as a group of cultural ambassadors for just that purpose. Senghor and Keita were able to mine certain aspects of modernist thinking – like rejection of the past, revisionism, and reprise – to present African dance from an African perspective, artistically and aesthetically. The characteristically modernist rejection of the past was a rejection of colonialist attitudes and

perspectives towards the arts of Africa. In Keïta and Senghor's case, it was the rejection of France's assimilation policy that accepted Africans if they embraced and participated in French culture. The African past was resurrected, preserved, and ensconced in many of the productions of the National Dance companies as a way of establishing artistic and cultural parity with the West in the minds of many African leaders. As Bruner states,

National dance troupes have been established in Uganda, Senegal, Mali and most other African nations as part of government policy, just as performance troupes, ethnic village complexes, nations in miniature, and national museums have been established in many countries in the world.

(2001: 887)

This self-consciousness, one of the hallmarks of the modernist movement, was one of the aspects that defined the National Dance Company movement. Keïta and Senghor were acutely aware that they were creating something new, that these new entities would serve the people of Guinea and Senegal through dance that was multi-disciplinary and involved storytelling, theatre, mask, stilt walking, and song.

Senghor and Keïta inspired a plethora of African national dance companies, many of which continue to this day. The idea of 'African dance' became institutionalized as a category and genre. During this modernist period, many others involved in African dance were influenced by and influenced the national African dance company phenomenon, including on the other side of the Atlantic, such as notable choreographers Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Rex Nettleford, the founder and first artistic director of the National Dance Theater of Jamaica. In this postmodern era in the diasporan arts (1960–80's), the modernist perspective continues in the area of African dance as national dance companies continue to be cultural ambassadors for their countries. African dance is changing even as it clings to an ever-present past. Terms like 'traditional', 'neo-traditional', and 'contemporary' help to situate the dance temporally. Yet, images of African dance in media and popular culture conjure up the sexual and erotic without context and substantive content. Modernity afforded Senghor and Keïta an opportunity to fashion the dances of their respective countries as entities that would serve a nationalist agenda and unite the many ethnic groups under the rubric of a national culture. To date, African dance has been most successful as a cultural embassy to the West.

The story of modern African dance is still being written. It is full of attempts to reshape, revise, and embrace the modern world even as it honours and preserves traditions. African dance in the modern era helped to address some of the negative and pejorative images of African dance in the minds and imagination of the West. From the continent of Africa to the African diaspora, dance continues to inspire, enthrall, and enchant. It also seeks to find its voice in a postmodern, technologically oriented society where expressions can sharply differ from one group to another, one person to another, and where meaning is elusive. The 'village' is global and the influences on African dance artistic expression increasingly come from different cultures and geographies. Nevertheless, the modernist period had an undeniably profound and permanent effect on the history of African dance.

NOTE

1. I am using the synthesized definition of George Barnett and Meihua Lee who define culture ‘as a property of a group. It is a group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and thoughts are understood’ (qtd. in Baldwin 2005: 13).

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CHAPTER TWENTY

MODERNISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN LITERATURE¹

—♦—
Nicholas Meihuizen

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although it is a simplification to say that Sub-Saharan African literature during the early stages of modernism was little touched by the intellectual and spiritual upheavals following the Darwinian, Nietzschean, and Freudian revolutions – which led to such Western metropolitan aesthetic responses as futurism, dadaism, expressionism, surrealism, and existentialism – this was in fact largely the case. As a socio-historical phenomenon, modernity was a colonial import, a colonial imposition, however much the benefits of modernization were at times desired. Reactions to it were not the result of a prolonged existential and psychological crisis beginning with the Reformation; modernity in itself was the crisis. As Michael Chapman notes, Africa as a whole responded through its various literatures to ‘the shared experience of colonialism in its abrasive, economic form attendant on strong, permanent settler populations’ (2003: xviii). Modernity arrived relatively suddenly, and aesthetic responses to it were premised for the most part upon a physical relationship to material conditions on the continent and the socio-political consequences of those material conditions. This is as true today of the social pragmatist Chinua Achebe as it is of the theoretical sophisticate J.M. Coetzee; of Steve Chimombo (immersed in Eliot) as much as Sol Plaatje (immersed in Shakespeare). Aesthetic responses to modernity were experienced in three broad stages: the early modernists set the example for African writers to free themselves from the influences of a dominant culture; the study of modernist texts at university in the 1940s and 1950s inspired future writers to explore new imaginative options; and writers from the 1960s up to the present consciously deploy modernist techniques to negotiate the crises attendant on post-colonialism (Gikandi 2003: 339).

The black African relation to modernization was formulated by Pixley ka Isaka Seme (a founder of the African National Congress, educated at Columbia and Oxford) in his essay ‘The regeneration of Africa’ (1904), a work that signalled the beginning of Africa’s engagement with the historical meaning and significance of modernity. The New African Movement that sprang from this theorizing was premised on a historical consciousness manifest in the thought – though separated by

two decades – of H.I.E. Dhlomo and R.V. Selope Thema (Masilela 2012: 329). This emphasis on the ‘New African’ in South Africa was clearly related to the emerging pan-African ideology of nationalism (spurred by modernized political practices), as well as new forms of artistic expression. The movement, like the philosophy of *négritude*, had a strong belief in a specifically African genius. Though opposed to colonial modernization, it was not opposed to modernity *per se*, and continually sought to express it. Another noteworthy feature of the ‘New Africans’ was their promotion of literature in local languages, a project that bore fruits in isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Sesotho. Bernth Lindfors, however, in pointing to the problems associated with the production of national literatures in Africa, notes that the majority of creative works in indigenous languages (58 per cent) has been published in only six of the more than 1,000 languages (Lindfors 1997: 123). These works nevertheless demonstrate that African languages are as capable as any other of reflecting the issues of modernity.

What were the cultural effects of social modernization in Africa? As in Europe, but for very different if related reasons, the same sense of the nature and significance of the creative act was evident. In Europe this resulted in the emphasis on aesthetic autonomy, and what Robert Pippin calls ‘independent self-legislating’, to do with the ‘epochality’ of modernity; that is, to do with the early twentieth century’s ability to become a ‘self-grounding epoch’ (1991: 40–41). The new sensibility involved self-affirming and self-creating impulses, whereby the role of the artist became very important, not as a social reformist, but as one who contributed to the sense of negation and revolution brought on by the social crises in Western industrial democracies. Sub-Saharan Africa registered the excitement of epochality in a different way. In some cases it followed the various forms and approaches of the Western metropolis because of the centrifugal force of aesthetic fashion, and in other cases it followed them because of local pressures and imperatives. Any revolutionary stirring in Africa during the early twentieth century stemmed from colonial issues, which, apart from matters to do with oppression and exploitation, included (perhaps to our surprise) a sense of aggrievement because of the belatedness inevitably associated with the periphery waiting on the centre. Simon Gikandi says that the colonies were excluded from the benefits of modernity, an exclusion that in large part stemmed from colonial (and metropolitan) attitudes to indigenous peoples, but also from the physical distances involved (2003: 338). Thus, far from being against it, local bodies such as the African National Congress regretted the absence of a modernizing initiative that could have benefitted the population. From this perspective, Gikandi feels that colonialism (which played a complex role in African modernization) did little to advance the satisfactory assimilation of modernity.

Another effect of colonial marginalization was a drive to prove to the centre that the periphery was not backward, in part by demonstrating artistic competence and sophistication through works modelled on older Western forms. In local terms, such work is experimental and modern because of its novelty; it is as much a reaction to modernization as was the European *avant-garde* (Olu Oguibe in Martin 2006: 152). Realist painting affords one example of this drive: the Nigerian Aina Onabolu turned from his own aesthetic heritage, centred in ritual and magic, to a form of realism that drew on Western tradition, but did not simply ape it: his portraits of people in traditional garb have their own distinct African quality, considered by Marilyn

Martin to be deliberately ‘subversive and appropriative’ (2006: 152) in their relation to Western art. Onobolu felt he had a right to choose how to express himself and thus engaged in his own form of independent self-legislating (2006: 152–53). A literary example would be that of South African Sol Plaatje, who incorporated stylistic and thematic elements of Shakespeare into his novel, *Mhudi* (1930).

Contemporaneous with Plaatje, however, we find South African writers of European background drawing on the canon of English literature for very different reasons, to do with nostalgia for the high-culture ensconced in metropolitan tradition (see the various entries in *The Centenary Book of South African Verse* [1925], edited by Francis Carey Slater). As Roy Campbell, writing in the 1920s in South Africa, was all too aware, many of these people were inherently indisposed to anything different or non-conformist (Campbell *et al.* 1985: 71–3). In short, a black and a white writer in South Africa (as in other parts of Africa) would draw on the same Western literary canon as a source of inspiration for very different reasons: the former because of a socio-cultural affirmation of self-worth as well as a fascination with new materials and approaches; the latter because of a colonial traditionalist need to preserve the perceived standards of European culture. These differing reasons can be seen as the psychological offspring of imperial expansionism and commercialization – the agents of modernization in the colonies.

AFRICA ‘LEGISLATES’ ITSELF

As we might gather from the case of Plaatje, Western education in Africa played an important role in modernization and the reactions to it. There was a perception among writers such as Elijah Makiwane, Pambani Jeremiah Mzimba, and John Tengo Jabavu that a missionary education in European languages introduced Africans to a rich literary world, which enabled them to move away from, in Ntongela Masilela’s terms, ‘African backwardness’, which they ‘abhorred’ (2012: 330). However, an ironic consequence of this education is considered to be a key feature of Africa’s literary history – for this acquired European education could be and was used to oppose European domination and influence. Take the case of the doctrine of *négritude*, first put forward by black students living in Paris. Albert Gérard points out that France (contemptuous of indigenous languages) instilled such an admiration for its own language and literature in the minds of black students, that to excel in French was the goal of many young Francophone intellectuals during the interwar years. Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Léopold Senghor from Senegal reacted against this trend, however, with their notion of *négritude*, which, in simple terms, defined African solidarity and spirituality against Western individualism and scepticism (Gérard 1990: 51). Later writers such as Wole Soyinka considered the movement to be idealistic and rather short-sighted in its aims and attitudes, but at the time it played an important inspirational role for a number of black writers, and not just Francophone ones. The black intellectuals who gathered under this virtual banner in Paris, however, were also exposed to the various anti-rational trends in contemporary Western thought; they came into contact (for instance) with the ideas of Freud, Bergson, and Lévy-Bruhl, witnessed the links made between avant-garde painting and African art, and experienced the intuitive, improvisational momentum of black American jazz in Parisian clubs. *Négritude* certainly received a boost from

these international currents, and, for all its ethnic aspirations, might be said to have been an expression of an African dialogue with modernity within a European context.

The ethnographic approach is currently quite stoutly upheld, and a ‘return to African roots’ with their pre-colonial values has once again become a catchword among certain critics (Fashina 2011: 47). Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby state that modernism had ‘problematised the relation to the “other”, and found ways of producing texts that allowed for multiple voices and a respectful relation to alterity and difference’ (Booth and Rigby 2000: 5). If this is so, one might argue that it is a modernist-related impulse in Africa that allows for the extreme expressions of the ethnographic mode. But its currency in the context of modernity might also be argued in terms of Bloch’s ‘simultaneous untemporaneity’. This notion posits the simultaneous coexistence of mythical, traditional, and modern elements. For instance, one of modernity’s ‘principal exports has been Westernised models of nationalism’, which have been established and maintained in Africa through typically romantic nationalist ‘claims or inventions of millennial traditions and lineages’ (Williams 2000: 33).

Africa’s literary achievement in English, as Gérard notes, is more impressive than in other languages (Gérard 1990: 53). This is possibly because of a more enlightened attitude on the part of the British, who, unlike the French, did take an interest in the preservation and understanding of local languages, and thus created a better atmosphere for promoting their own. A two-way traffic resulted, not always disinterested, as when missionaries found it most effective for their proselytizing purposes to translate the Bible into local languages. This led not only to the transcription of these languages, but also to the preservation of tales and customs, as in the work of Henry Callaway in South Africa, gathered in a volume titled *The Religious System of the AmaZulu* (Callaway 1970 [1870]). As Lindfors notes, aspirant authors considered international languages to offer them more advantages, though using them meant catering primarily for overseas audiences at the expense of local ones (Lindfors 1997: 126). This albeit compromised position produced such classics as Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi* (1930), Peter Abrahams’s *Mine Boy* (1946), Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), and the novels of the late Chinua Achebe, to name a few.

TECHNIQUES, CHARACTERISTICS, AND GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD

When it comes to a brief overview of literature in the expanse that is Sub-Saharan Africa, it is necessary to be highly selective. Creativity in Africa is expressed in hundreds of languages, which draw on thousands of different traditions. Although Gérard, in writing of the early influence of Semitic script, notes that ‘the continent had produced written works in its own languages even before the earliest literatures appeared in the Celtic and Germanic languages of Western Europe’ (1990: 47), Gikandi feels that most contemporary African literature takes its cue from modernism (2003: 339). Jahan Ramazani lists the following indigenized modernist structures: ‘translocal geographies that layer the local and the foreign, heteroglot vocabularies that creolise standard and dialectical registers, syncretic fusions that counterpoint diverse religious and mythical systems, and apocalyptic imaginings that conjure violent cultural

transformation' (2007: 208). Ramazani does not provide examples, but all these techniques manifest clearly in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Other techniques include the following: a depiction of fractured experience, as in Antje Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998); the use of multiple perspectives, as in Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986); an emphasis on subjectivism, as in Niyi Osundare's *Songs from the Marketplace* (1983), or Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002); a comic parodying of colonial, nationalist, and ethnic pretensions, as in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963); and the use of irony, as in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1958), Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). In South Africa the Soweto poets of the 1970s conflate elements of Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, the Harlem Renaissance, Beat poetry, and traditional praise poetry in order to convey their largely politicized worldview. Characteristics of such writing are abrupt changes of register, colloquialisms, and hybrid traditional and modern references. The Afrikaner *Sestigers* (writing in the 1960s, hence their name, which means 'those of the sixties') turned in belated fashion to explicitly modernist techniques in order to challenge prevailing narrow-mindedness, nationalist orthodoxy, and racial discrimination. This group included such later luminaries as André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and Etienne Leroux. Their reaction (though from the midst of the ruling class of the time) was itself a version of the crisis of post-colonialism linked to modernization in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. This crisis was recorded in Nigeria, for instance, in both Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), works that also critiqued African nationalism and its attendant corruption. As Gikandi states, such works severely criticized 'the utopian claims that had driven nationalism', which was now seen as 'empty signs, history become a nightmare', part of a 'narrative of decolonization itself a tyrannical totality that repressed the self-conscious individual and imprisoned language' (2003: 339). Other writers involved in this demythologizing of nationalism were Ama Ata Aidoo (a playwright from Ghana who viewed traditional practices from a decidedly critical perspective) and Ivory Coast novelist Ahmadou Kourouma. It has been noted above that Western cultural traditions were used to fuel both experimentation and dogged conformism. The reactions against both these trends can also be linked to colonialism's traffic with modernity. That is, Western-inspired art in black artists would be castigated or at least reacted against because of its European nature, and the blindly adopted traditional norms of white society would be denounced as philistine and parochial by the likes of Roy Campbell. Later in the twentieth century, these two strands would become a focus of post-colonial criticism. Other works might respond to modernity in more oblique ways. Camara Laye's *Dark Child* (1953) shows a world untouched by the modern, and exhibits to an extent the same sectioning off of psychological, internalized concerns from public pressures that we find in Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* (1926). In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), though modernity is also held at bay, modern notions of individualism and acquisitiveness are evident. Michael Bell contends that 'modernism [in Africa] was [...] the means for a diagnostic understanding of the colonial mentality' (1997: 149). Such a 'diagnostic understanding' is clearly in evidence in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Pauline Smith's portrayal of the English in *The Beadle* – anticipated at various points in her 1913–14 journal, since published as *Secret Fire* (1997) – and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964).

AFRICAN MODERNISM?

Africa's problematic relationship with commonly understood notions of modernism is highlighted by Gikandi, who notes that African writers were suspicious of 'three central claims in the discourse of high modernism – the critique of history, the negation of realism, and the insistence on the autonomy of art' (2003: 339). Because of these suspicions they sought to reclaim history in their own terms, used realism to counter notions of cultural backwardness and irrationality, and linked their art to pedagogical and political aims. Thus, Alan Paton, whose *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) made an international impact when first published, overlays his narrative of neighbourly reconciliation with fraught socio-historical material. Of central concern for Paton is dislocation, and the complexities involved in the bridging of tradition and the new, or the differences between races.

But is this work, and others that would subscribe to Gikandi's debunking of the discourse of high modernism, exemplary of a specifically local brand of modernism? And when we consider local work that exhibits European modernist traits, is this work not of a different order to the literary experimentalism engaged in by key modernists? In comparison with the originary remoulding of form and content associated with Western modernist texts, this work is secondary, not constitutive. This is not to question the impact of modernist elements on local writers nor the potency of what was produced. Discernible influences include, for example, Samuel Beckett's austere formalism in J.M. Coetzee; W.B. Yeats' notions of epochal change and the transformation of history into myth in Achebe; and T.S. Eliot's remarkably widespread stylistic and thematic sway. Césaire (an inspirational figure among African writers) in such works as *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* [1947]) draws on Eliot's vision of unified human time from 'The Dry Salvages', while Malawian David Rubadiri's poem 'Stanley Meets Mutesa' (1965) contains elements of 'Journey of the Magi', and fellow Malawian Steve Chimombo deliberately imitates 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' with his 'Lament'. The Afrikaner N.P. van Wyk Louw's volume of poems, *Tristia* (1962), is knowingly involved in an intertextual relationship with *The Waste Land* (van Vuuren 2001: 36). General modernist influences are clearly apparent in the work of the poets John Pepper Clark and Christopher Okigbo from Nigeria, Kofi Awoonor from Ghana, Okot p'Bitek, Lennard Okola, Jared Angira, and John Ruganda from Uganda, and Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, and Felix Mnthali from Malawi. Zimbabwean Musaemura Zimunya's collection of poetry, *Zimbabwe Ruins* (1979), contains ontological probings said to be reminiscent of Sartre and Heidegger (Roscoe and Msiska 1992: 131).

Evoking the processes of hybridization, Ramazani claims that local works 'modernise the indigenous and indigenise the modern' (Ramazani 2007: 219). Consider the writings of Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, and Lewis Nkosi, who express modernism in 1950s South Africa through their journalistic energy, their emphasis on the city, their American-inspired argot. Though Nkosi feels that local practice cannot be equated with Western practice, continuity is often apparent. David Attwell points to Njabulo Ndebele's experiments with 'Joycean internal monologues in isiZulu', Muthobi Muloatse's modernist manifesto, with its declaration, 'we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer', Esk'ia

Mphahlele's 'fusion' of different consciousnesses and 'imagined black (diasporic) argot' in *Down Second Avenue* (1959), and Nkosi's 'self-ironising introspection' in *Mating Birds* (1983) (Attwell 2005: 173–4).

The settler writing of Kenya, exemplified in the work of Karen Blixen and Elspeth Huxley, also reveals a modernist influence. Abdulrazak Gurnah notes that although this writing did not show the characteristics of high modernism, it challenged established discourses in modernist fashion. Focusing on Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* and Blixen's *Out of Africa* (both first published in 1937), he refers to 'the deconstructive complexity, the ambivalence and the self-irony' in the writing (Gurnah 2000: 282). In these and other works, the exiled self with its primitivist, authentic relation to nature is set against the forces of modernity. A troubling aspect of this writing, however, is the narrators' relationships with the 'other', the Indigene, who must be controlled or expelled, providing a weird reflection (like the later doctrine of apartheid in South Africa) of the desire for 'purity' and exclusion that could shadow modernist impulses.

CONCLUSION

While one cautions that the modernist elements in the practice of the above writers, as powerful as they often are, are iterative of European modernism, one yet needs to be aware of the problems surrounding such a view. Attwell, for instance, sees a 'political problem' inherent in the question of 'whether black [South African modernist] writing repeats the subject-construction of European modernism, or whether it offers something distinctive and original' (2005: 202). He notes that critics such as Kelwyn Sole invoke the political issue by unjustly linking modernist experimentalism in Africa with 'a reactionary subjectivity that has proved itself to be politically evasive and socially exclusive' (202). In the end, Attwell feels that 'a full and final answer to the question of whether this writing represents repetition or renewal is not really possible, since the question itself is open to the future as a utopian gesture' (204). This seems to suggest that the impact of the literature is yet being ascertained, that it is not isolated from a social process still in flux, whence distinctively African subject-constructions might yet emerge. Chapman, however, would emphasize what has been achieved: he points, by way of example, to Césaire's relation to European modernism. Chapman feels Césaire restores the 'African mask' (as used by Picasso, for instance) 'to an African ontology', 'based not on the imitation of reason, but on the expression of vital forces intimately connecting physical and metaphysical aspects of being' (Chapman 2006: 6–7). Césaire arrives at a sense of 'human community' through this vitalism, 'usually represented by a gap of incomprehension in Euro-American modernism', and it is through the presence of this community that a specifically African modernism can be posited (Chapman 2006: 6–7). Certainly Chapman's sense of 'human community' is apparent in many instances in the literature of Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, but whether the restoration to Africa of a traditional motif in traditional terms is illustrative of an expressly African modernism, is, again, another matter. What is not in contention is that African writing takes its principal bearings, at least (even reactionary ones), from European modernism, and perhaps, for the time being, one must rest content with this limited fact.

NOTE

- I. Thanks to my research assistant, Mercia Morris, for her help in acquiring materials and researching university syllabi in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MUSIC AND MODERNISM IN AFRICA



Tsitsi Jaji

Africa as a sign of radical difference has been notoriously central to European and American formulations of modernism. Its complex role as antipodal instigator and antinomic exception is a critical commonplace. High modernism as an aestheticized encounter with the Other often drew upon Africa, whether in the negrophilic embrace of African sculpture by painters like Picasso and Braque, or in the negrophobic revulsion of Joseph Conrad's *Mr Kurtz*. As Simon Gikandi has explained, modernism's turn to Africa (whether as the primal, generative source material or primitive opposite of the modern) took the continent's cultural productions as an epiphany, but this turn was haunted by a contradiction: motivated by an impossible 'need to merge with the other as the most effective and instinctive rejection of previous forms of consciousness,' it also 'could only be represented through the imposition of a frame of reference and set of categories that preceded its discovery' (2006: 32). This contradiction makes it exceedingly difficult and yet essential to set aside such frames of reference and to reckon with what Africa's own definitions and contributions to modernism entail.

This essay takes an intentionally flexible approach to modernism, grounded in African aesthetic responses to the historical experiences of modernity. Susan Stanford Friedman notes that post-colonial critics 'often link modernity with imperialism and the national struggles for emergence within the contradictory conditions of hybridization and continued dependence on the colonial power' (2001: 500). Extending this, I argue that African modernism refers to aesthetic responses to the shock of modernity in the violent encounters with European colonization and the haunting histories of internal, Arab, and trans-Atlantic slavery. Conceiving this history from an African perspective, our attention should focus on the continent's long decolonizing process, beginning after the Berlin Conference of 1884 where the European nations negotiated how to divide and rule Africa, colonial cultural policies, and the significant cultural changes prompted by Christian missionary activities and continuing to this day. Accounting for modernism in Africa demands attention to the profound significance of African American (and, to a lesser extent, other diasporic) musical and cultural influences. African artists participated in these transnational cultural flows, embracing diasporic music for both its own intrinsic worth and its

symbolic value as emerging from a modern habitus already inscribed with histories of resistance to racism and the legacies of slavery. This kind of global circulation of black aesthetics, or ‘stereomodernism’ was multi-directional and multi-iterated (Jaji 2014: 1–22); just as diasporic blacks studied and laid claim to a heritage of African expressive cultures, so Africans took an interest in African-American literature, music and political organization.

In this chapter I emphasize African modernist musics in the period that overlaps with other global modernisms, particularly from the early twentieth century through to 1944, the date of the Brazzaville conference where the French colonies began agitating for independence, which would be largely granted in 1960. Among the social processes most influential in this period are rapid urbanization and the emergence of new gender roles relating to male recruitment into wage labour in mines, factories, and, to a lesser extent, civil service; transformation in religious practices and political authority anchored to customary law; a growing awareness of the local in relation to the global; and particularly, affiliation with black diasporic cultures involved in related struggles against colonialism and racism. Indigenous African aesthetic values in ‘traditional’ African music remain highly relevant. They include call-and-response structures, heterogenous timbres, polyphony and polyrhythms, participatory formats, and a close link to oral literature (proverbs, stories, histories, and poetry). However, to speak of ‘traditional music’ in Africa in this period is necessarily to speak of traditions in various processes of modernizing. How have African musical traditions been extended, elaborated upon and departed from? Whether in transforming purpose, adopting Western instruments or new materials for constructing indigenous instruments, or adapting imported genres like choral singing, jazz, or rumba to reflect local aesthetics, African music in the time of modernism was a crucial site for artistic experimentation and robust exercises in adaptation and transformation. It can be conceived as a call-and-response with indigenous historical musics and global musical currents, as the following interlinking case studies demonstrate.

Anthropologist Karin Barber, extending the work of political theorist Jean-François Bayart, has characterized a key element of African creative practices as ‘extraversion’ or the ‘ability to draw in and creatively absorb materials from outside in order to fuel local contests and projects’ (Barber 1997: 6). Put another way, the famous Poundian injunction to ‘make it new’ has long motivated the transformation of imported sonic material into grist for locally conceived organized sound. While musicology of Africa long emphasized traditional musics, an attention to urban and popular forms has revealed how music responded to dilemmas across the modernist world. Scholars note:

the dynamics of urban-rural transformation and the articulation of heterogeneous worlds, the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernization, [...] questions of race and ethnicity [...] the relationship between social structure and culture, between historical process and consciousness as it is dialectically constituted in performance.

(Erlmann 1991: 2).

Because of its rapid growth as a capitalist, modernized society driven by a mining and agricultural economy that entailed dramatic population migrations, South Africa

offers a particularly useful site to consider trends that applied to other parts of Africa as well. A broad range of (primarily) protestant Christian missions in the nineteenth century combined proselytizing with education projects. Music education was crucial in such projects because of the role played by congregational and part-singing in religious worship. As Grant Olwage notes, the first published piece of notated music by a black South African was a hymn, John Knox Bokwe's 1892 setting of a Xhosa hymn by Cape missionary J.A. Chalmers *Msinidisi wa boni* (*Saviour of Sinners*) (Olwage 2006: 1). Choral singing remained an important pastime, which mission-educated black elites considered central to performing the habitus of the modern black subject. When black South Africans began to teach in mission schools and open their own institutions, music was core to the curriculum. Music also played an important role in the black internationalization and indigenization of Christianity in South Africa. It reflected the influence of the European and American mission societies, of touring African American performance groups, and of cosmopolitan musical practices that incorporated Dutch, Malay, and other influences.

A rapid overview of the various forms of elite and traditional music incorporated into modern popular music in South Africa from the 1890s to 1950s might look like this: audiences became familiar with vaudeville repertoires through local and international troupes ranging from Christy's Minstrels to the Virginia Jubilee Singers. Many of the best-trained musicians had learned sol-fa notation and harmony in mission schools, although often a good musical ear outweighed knowledge of notation for securing work. Among those who read sol-fa notation, a repertoire developed merging local part-singing aesthetics, Victorian choral traditions, and eventually a range of instruments. While there were numerous religious songs composed by black South Africans, John and Nokutela Dube's *Zulu Song Book* (c.1911) was an important innovation as it collected and arranged a body of newly composed secular Zulu-language songs, and was envisioned as a prompt for more Zulu compositional activity. A student of the Dube's, Reuben Caluza, took this work even farther. His double quartet recorded 53 10-inch double electrical records for the Zonophone label, featuring original ragtime or syncopated music, folk songs, and vaudeville songs that addressed topical political matters (such as the Natives Land Act of 1913), as well as a school fight song praising a zebra mascot. At the same time, labour conditions in the mines left many mining directors anxious about managing (or moralizing) their workers' free time, and competitive dance and song such as the *isicathamiya* became widely popular. A similar phenomenon appeared in East Africa in *mashindano*, or competitive musical performances, in Kenya and Tanzania, where teams were often linked by age group, status, etc., rather than by workplace (Gunderson and Barz 2000). The combination of music and dance was codified in the concert and dance format of most early vaudeville and jazz in South Africa.

Concert and dance included many ingenious adaptations to the constricted legal environment of segregated South Africa. Because of pass laws, night curfews, and poor transportation options, an all-night indoors event was preferable to one that would leave listeners stranded in the dark after it ended. Venues were often at shebeens; the format typically included a vaudeville concert from 8 p.m. until midnight, then a dance that ran until 4 a.m. The music played was originally *marabi* style, although it evolved over the years. The melodic material was surprisingly

limited, drawn largely from African Christian hymns, and a mixture of Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu songs. As Christopher Ballantine describes it, *marabi* structure was

cyclical repetitions of one melody or melodic fragment, yielding eventually, perhaps, to a similar treatment of another melody or fragment, and perhaps then still others, each melody possibly from a different source. [Musicians could play for hours non-stop]. Throughout, a rhythmic accompaniment would be provided by a player shaking a tin filled with small stones.

(1991: 135).

In other words, *marabi* was both participatory and competitive, associated with a social sphere in conflict with the state. This tension with the state distinguishes *marabi* from a mass-culture form and supports considering it as musical modernism, where repetition stylizes constraint and creates a space of radical sonic (and political) possibility. With the popularity of *marabi* came an opportunity to specialize and develop the music. Members of well-known ensembles like the Merry Blackbirds, Jazz Maniacs, and others became fixtures through advertising in modern media formats like the black newspapers *Bantu World*, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, and the like.

Black South African musical modernism coincided with what Ntongela Masilela has outlined as the New African Movement and its inheritors. One way to periodize it would mark its end in 1948 with the National Party's election, formal legislation of apartheid, and forced removals of residents of neighbourhoods like Johannesburg's artistically vibrant Sophiatown and Cape Town's District Six. Yet the beginning point is less well known. Charlotte Manye (later Maxeke) provides an excellent object lesson here. Manye Maxeke is best remembered for her role in facilitating a link between her uncle, Revd J.M. Mokone (who had pioneered formation of a black denomination), and the African Methodist Episcopal Church (which took Manye Maxeke in after her manager went bankrupt and educated her at Wilberforce College). However, her musical experiences have much to teach us about musical modernism in Africa.

As a young Xhosa woman in Kimberley, Manye Maxeke performed contralto solos in local concerts, making her debut in 1890 in a city awash in new sounds. As David Coplan describes it, the musical environment of turn-of-the-century Kimberley was highly cosmopolitan and deeply marked by a transforming labour market following the discovery of diamonds (Coplan 2008: 13–73). In the mix were Afrikaans *vastrap* (fast-step) ensembles including guitar, concertina, banjo, cornet, violin, and piano; Khoisan who improvised new melodies on homemade violins; American honkytonk players (both white and black); and Cape coloured musicians who specialized in the *tickey draai* (threepence) guitar style. The musical world of Kimberley was produced by cultural encounters among variegated classes and races, and innovations arose out of novel juxtapositions.

In this context the sisters Charlotte and Kate Manye were recruited to perform in the South African Choir (African Jubilee Singers) touring England in 1891. The group was advertised as raising funds for education in South Africa, and in this respect resembled the Fisk Jubilee Singers who had famously raised money for Fisk University by performing concert arrangements of African-American spirituals. The African Jubilee Singers presented a programme that placed modernity in the spotlight,

performing ‘native songs’ for the first half of their programme while costumed in putatively traditional dress, including some rather unlikely animal skins, and then making a quick costume change to English Victorian garb for the second half which presented Western choral repertoire (Erlmann 1991: 48).

Their performances were controversial in part because audiences found the South Africans’ performances of Western repertoire unsettlingly accomplished. In many ways, the programme’s exposure of malleable aesthetic standards and the conventions of ethnographic display remained crucial elements of African musical modernism for decades. The plot of Senegalese novelist Ousmane Socé Diop’s 1937 *Mirages de Paris* imagines what the colonial subjects who were hired to perform in the Paris Colonial Exhibition’s African village tableaux did to entertain themselves in the evenings. The protagonist, Fara, is housed at ‘Le Modern Hôtel’ in Paris-Orsay. Its very location spells Socé’s appraisal of colonial urban modernity as alienation: the hotel is

dans une rue transversale qui n’aboutissait ni à une grande place ni à un édifice public important; on y était à l’abri de la tyrannie des klaxons et du halètement des moteurs. [on a cross-street that opens onto neither a town square nor an important public building, but even indoors, one cannot escape the tyranny of honking horns or the fumes of running motors].

(Socé 1964: 28, my translation)

The space in Socé’s novel most alive with the energies of modernism as an aestheticized response to the experience of modernity is the Cabane Cubaine. Here Fara passes time deciphering the array of nationalities and skin-tones circulating through the space – Africans, Haitians, Mauritians, and Martinicans. For Socé, music is the great equalizer: French, Americans, Germans, Brits, people of colour all submit to

la tyrannie du rythme; l’orchestre les maniait à sa guise, il le rendait tour à tour trépidants, rêveurs, amers ou ivres d’allégresse! [the tyranny of rhythm; the orchestra manipulates them at will, it renders them by turns fearful, dreamy, bitter or drunk with happiness].

(58, my translation)

Fara associates jazz with an electric drive measured in kilowatts, while the rumba echoes more in the heart. Jazz stands in for a technologically overwhelming present, and the rumba for a more affectively dynamic, human-centric elsewhere, evoking ‘une fille noire se balançant, dans son hamac, à la tombée des soirs, bercée par la complainte d’une guitare’ [‘a black girl balancing in her hammock at eventide, lulled gently by the plaints of a guitar’] (Socé 1964: 62, my translation). Consuming popular diasporic music like jazz and rumba was not merely a way to critique the Colonial Exhibition’s farcical demands upon colonial subjects to perform an anachronistic primitive in the heart of the French empire. Popular music did more than subjugate the listener to rhythm; it elicited musical taste and critical discernment, making the Cabane Cubaine an important scene for enacting modern subjecthood. The narrative of encountering diasporic music in France is historically accurate, and, as Tim Mangin (2004) has noted, the large numbers of Senegalese (and other West African) soldiers who served during the world wars, as well as students who studied in France

in the interwar years, were among the first to encounter jazz, long before the US occupation of Vichy-controlled Dakar in 1942 brought significant numbers of Americans to Senegal. In the years after, military bands would follow their official performances with jazz sessions, and jazz music played increasingly on the radio, thus making stereomodernist musical taste, that put Africa and the diaspora in conversation, more widely accessible.

This theme of musical discernment also arises in Léopold Sédar Senghor's poems, whose titles indicate their accompaniment with kora, balaphon, or jazz ensemble. Senghor ascribed emotion to *négritude* with the reason ascribed to Hellenic civilization. However, his deployment of music shows that musical reasoning is at the core a modern black subjectivity. Consider his 1956 poem 'Teddungal (guimm pour kôra)' ['Honour (*guimm* for kora)']. 'Teddungal' transforms the praising functions of a master of oral poetry, the griot, into the diction of post-Imagiste French:

Sall ! je proclame ton nom Sall ! du Fouta-Damga au Cap-Vert
Le lac Baïdé faisait nos pieds plus frais, et maigres nous marchions par le
Pays-haut du Dyêri.

[Sall! I proclaim your name Sall! From Fouta-Damga to Cap-Vert
Lake Baïdé freshened our pace, and frailly we walked through the
highlands of Dyêri.]

(Senghor 1956: 20, my translation)

For Senegalese literary modernists, music could flexibly accommodate and reconfigure relations between 'traditional' and innovative poetics. There was no dichotomy between them that would cordon off indigenous poetics as inassimilable to modernity, let alone modernism.

As already suggested, African musical modernism is best understood in the context of trans-national black cultural flows, or stereomodernism. An interest in African music was a key element of African-American modernism, and philosopher Alain Locke, composers William Grant Still, and musicologist Shirley McCann (later married to W.E.B. Du Bois) keenly noted adaptations of African material in contemporary compositions. Du Bois famously included musical extracts from ten spirituals as the incipits accompanying epigraphs as chapter headings in his highly influential 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*. While he saw the spirituals as sorrow songs emerging from centuries of enslavement, he was also interested in how music proffered an unbroken link to Africa, and found in his family history an intimate example of this:

My grandfather's grandmother was seized by an evil Dutch trader two centuries ago; and coming to the valleys of the Hudson and Housatonic, black, little, and lithe, she shivered and shrank in the harsh north winds, looked longingly at the hills, and often crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees, thus:

Do ba – na co – ba, ge – ne me, ge – ne me!
Do ba – na co – ba, ge – ne me, ge – ne me!
Ben d' nu – li, nu – li, nu – li, nu – li, ben d' le

The child sang it to his children and they to their children's children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children.

(2008 [1903]: 123)

Guthrie Ramsey has traced how the modern interest in science as an authoritative epistemological approach drove an early African-American commitment to musicology, and notes James Trotter's 1878 *Music and Some Highly Musical People* as a groundbreaking text. Even in this proto-modernist moment, the status of notation as an element of modern musical practice was significant, for Trotter notes that his aim is

not only to show the proficiency of the subjects of the foregoing sketches as interpreters of the music of others, but, further, to illustrate the ability of quite a number of them (and, relatively, that of their race) to originate and scientifically arrange good music.

(qtd. in Ramsey 1996: 17).

Du Bois's contemporary, composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, received a thoroughly British musical education, studying with the dean of Victorian choral music, Charles Stanford, and gaining the encouraging notice of Edward Elgar, widely considered a founding figure of British modernist music. However, Coleridge-Taylor expressed his Afro-British identity by turning to the dialect (and standard English) lyrics of African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in the late 1890s. As he continued to reach towards what Paul Richards calls pan-African composition, and to connect to his father's Sierra Leonean heritage, the new scientific discipline of ethnomusicology offered the necessary resources (Richards 2001). His *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies* (1904), published only a year after *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), presented virtuosic arrangements of melodies from published spirituals, Henri Junod's path-breaking collection *Les Chants et les Contes des Ba-Ronga* (*Songs and Tales of the Ba-Ronga*, 1897), and a West African song collected by Victoria Randall. While often overlooked in light of popular musics like jazz, the blues, and gospel blues, ethnomusicology remained an important strand of African-American musical modernism, particularly in the work of scholars including Maude Cuney Hare, Camille Nickerson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Shirley Graham Du Bois. The intersection between ethnomusicology and composition was most markedly present in Graham Du Bois's opera *Tom-Tom: an Epic of Music and the Negro*, which was staged in Cleveland, with one performance broadcast over radio on 26 June 1932. Graham scored the piece entirely for voices and percussion, reflecting her interest in incorporating research on African instruments and timbres into her own compositional language. Like other concert music composers of her day, such as Nathaniel Dett and William Grant Still, Graham Du Bois used vernacular folk music melodies and timbres to vivify, modernize, and appropriate a seemingly Western idiom. However, she turned to continental Africa where others borrowed from African-American spirituals, which were often noted for being autochthonous to the United States. A crucial parallel to this marriage of ethnomusicology and composition manifests in the concert art music of West African composers. The comparatively long history of Western music in Nigeria (the Handel and Haydn society in Lagos sponsored performances of Handel's *Messiah* in the

nineteenth century) and Ghana, and the work of scholar-composers like J.H. Kwabena Nketia and Akin Euba, has enabled a robust critical debate about how African composers should see their relation to African musical practices and repertoires.

Later in the century, the jazz world took the lead in incorporating sonic material from Africa. Duke Ellington's 'jungle music' of the 1920s and 1930s trafficked in primitivist negrophilia to apply an exotic patina to sonic innovations like flams that 'dirtied' the attack on brass notes, multiple lines soloing simultaneously, and the use of wa-wa and other mutes to alter timbres. However, with the 1947 release of 'Manteca', a collaboration between Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo, jazz began incorporating African-based elements of Cuban rhythms, particularly the clave, into its repertoire. African influences on jazz took many shapes in the next decades. One could see the direct influence of African repertoire in the tune 'Skokiaan' by Zimbabwean saxophonist August Musarurwa, and recorded with his Cold Storage Band by South African ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey in 1951. 'Skokiaan' was adapted by a number of American jazz musicians, with iconic versions by Johnny Hodges, Herb Alpert, and Louis Armstrong. Armstrong met Musarurwa during his State Department-sponsored tour of Africa in 1960, illustrating the kind of feedback loops John Collins associates with trans-Atlantic black musical exchange (Collins 1987). A related dynamic manifests in the careers of African musicians who worked closely with American jazz musicians, such as Ghanaian drummer Guy Warren and South African singer Sathima Bea Benjamin. Contrastingly, some left the United States to adopt African music, such as Randy Weston, who embraced Moroccan Gnawa music after departing from the United States and settling in Morocco in the 1960s. In all cases, a stereomodernist connection between continental and diasporic musics extends beyond a narrowly conceived modernist historical period and reveals that modernism in African music is conceived of as a set of inter-cultural aesthetic strategies.¹

NOTE

1. For more on Warren, Benjamin and Weston see Kelley.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

‘A RANGE OF MODERNISMS’ Sub-Saharan African theatre and the modernist world



Chukwuma Okoye

At the 1884–5 Berlin Conference, African territories were carved up among six European nations in a move to resolve ‘the Scramble for Africa’, a frenzied rivalry for the control and exploitation of African peoples and resources. By 1912 every African nation, save South Africa, Liberia, and Ethiopia, was a European colony.¹ Thus, ‘those very ideologies of scientific rationalism and teleological progress’ embraced by European powers ‘served as instruments of imperial governance by which global majorities were mismeasured and managed’ (O’Brien 2013: 8). Not only did European knowledge construe Africa as its inferior ‘other’, it also proclaimed Europe’s divine duty to ‘civilize’ and graciously usher it into the ‘modern’ world. Of course, this was flimsy justification for Europe’s political subjection and massive exploitation of Africa’s economic and human resources.

A fervid disaffection with the ideals of reason and progress spread across Europe after the Second World War. Following this period, most European colonies in Africa became more concerted in their resistance to colonization and agitation for independence. This spirit of decolonization was not founded on a lack of faith in ‘modernity’ but on a conviction that Africans were capable of modernizing on their own terms and by their own means. From this period onwards, proliferating nationalist movements across Africa progressively began to secure independence for their countries. This provided Africans with the opportunity to husband their resources and recuperate their subjectivity, which was negated in the narratives of European colonists. Africans proceeded to forge a modern identity from the twin legacies of colonialism and indigenous tradition. This engagement was peculiar to each nation because both colonization and independence did not come at the same time and by the same process across all African countries. Cultural and political diversities also accounted for peculiarities in the brands of modernity desirable to individual African nations. Nonetheless, every instance is located within what O’Brien describes as modernism’s ‘universal agon between past and present in pursuit of the future’ (2013: 8).

For Africa, however, modernism has been a peculiar *agon* between two persistent pasts – the imposed colonial and the received indigenous traditions – both of which are enlisted, as well as resisted, in the endeavour to forge a modern African subjectivity. This endeavour entailed a dialectical reception and rejection of both European

'colonial modernity'² and African indigeneity (Amkpa 2004: 5). Modern African theatre exemplifies this dialectic. According to Demas Nwoko, it was understood that this new theatre 'should not ape European art and should not be a mere copy of traditional African art' (1981: 468). Also, it should not be 'an entirely new art', but 'a perpetuation of our artistic traditions' (473). It must consciously deploy cultural idioms already familiar to its potential audience, for 'it is still true that even when the form to be communicated is entirely new, it has to be introduced through the known older forms' (474).

MODERN THEATRE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA³

Robert Leach notes that 'Modern theatre is the theatre of today. "Modernist" theatre refers to the theatre of the first fifty or so years of the last century' (2004: 1). He further observes that 'the avant-garde artistic movements of the Modernists [...] were not only themselves fragments of the greater "Modernist culture", they were also responses to the perceived fragmentation of experience' (1). Although Leach is writing about modern European theatre, his words resonate in our representation of 'modern' African theatre. Modern African theatre is a 'response' to the pervasive colonial and post-colonial nervousness and spirited self-rehabilitation after the fragmentation of the African universe which European colonization wrought. 'Modernist theatre' insinuates itself into modern African theatre. As Chika Okeke insists,

African modernism cannot be broached merely by invoking European modernism, for it is not, as some historians have claimed, simply an African manifestation of twentieth-century European art – even though we will certainly find many instances of artists consciously adopting, adapting, quoting, decomposing, critiquing and even transgressing European avant-garde strategies, creating work that dramatizes the restless intellectual encounters of artists engaged in a continuously evolving project of subject formation.

(2013: 30)

This is a fitting representation of modern African theatre. I can only observe that this interrogation of modernism is not always conscious and direct. It is often implicated in the social consciousness of contemporary African dramatists in their confrontation with the many challenges that beleaguer Africa's social, cultural, and political progress; or, as Femi Osofisan puts it, 'the various problems of underdevelopment which our countries are facing' (1999: 3).

African theatre is often categorized into the indigenous or traditional, and the modern or literary (Ogunbiyi 1981: 9–11). Deploying Africa's colonial experience as a temporal marker, some classify African theatre traditions into the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial (Losambe and Sarinjeive 2001). These categories are continuous, and although each is identifiable with a particular historical moment, they all coexist today in varying degrees of intensity. However, the focus here is on modern African theatre, a literary model which evolved around the middle of the twentieth century following the cultural nationalist movements that informed the agitation for self-determination. So, although its roots can be traced to the colonial

era, modern African theatre emerged during the years immediately before and after independence, from the 1950s to the 1960s. It was a response to an uneasy reality: the experience of colonization and the dire need to invent a new African independent identity. It was neither a yearning for a total retrieval of indigenous cultures nor a desire for European-style entertainment. Characterized as a creative expression formed from the interaction of local and Western cultures, modern African theatre is typically diverse, ranging from a conscious imitation of European models, through a nativist recuperation of indigenous performance cultures, to subversive translations of Western and indigenous performance mechanics.

The idea of a modern African theatre is very complex and heterogeneous because of the plurality of ethnic identities, with their diverse cultural practices and ideologies, which populate the continent. This is further muddled by European colonial presence which, although consistent in its aims and ideologies, adapted its enterprise to the different regions in colonial Africa. Temporal, historical, cultural, social, material, political, and other peculiarities create disparate orders of modern African theatre. Thus, Chika Okeke observes that ‘in Africa one can even speak of a range of modernisms specific to the continent’s different countries’ (2013: 30). However, despite a plurality of ‘modernisms’ in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are discernible structural, ideological, historical, political, and thematic resonances that validate the pronouncement of a modern African theatre. As Amkpa observes,

what dramatic literature and the theatrical traditions they enunciate [in Africa] have in common is that they constitute a frontier within which cultures – varieties of indigenous forms and foreign ones, the literary and oral, the secular and religious – intertwine, conflict, or are integrated into the cosmopolitan outlook of each society.

(2007: 14)

The origins of modern African theatre can be traced to the early dramatic expressions of new African elites. Writing on the origins of modern theatre in Ghana, James Gibbs observes that ‘with the establishment of a European community, churches, and schools, the circumstances that would eventually lead to a theatre tradition involving scheduled performances, paying audiences, playscripts, and other elements of “European theatre” had been put in place’ (2009: xvi). In Nigeria, D.O. Oloyede’s *King Elejigbo and Princess Abeje of Kotangora*, performed in 1902 as a response to the growing desire for indigenous content from the African patrons of European-style opera, concert, and musical performances in Lagos, laid the foundation for the Travelling Theatre tradition which Hubert Ogunde, the acclaimed father of modern Nigerian theatre, inherited and developed. Kobina Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1915) is the first of this modern-type drama in Ghana. It employed the local popular comic conventions of broad humour, social satire, and caricature, which became more pronounced in the concert party, a popular travelling theatre mode established by Bob Johnson through the performances of the Versatile Eight, a company he founded in 1922. In Francophone Africa, *La Dernière Entrevue de Bèhanzin et de Beyol* (*The Last Interview of Behanzin and Beyol*), written in 1933 by Dahomean students of the influential École William Ponty in Senegal, was the first play written by the new African elite. This was a dramatic sketch narrating the encounter between Behanzin,

a nineteenth-century Dahomey monarch, and Beyol, a French colonist intent on conquering his kingdom (Conteh-Morgan 1994: 50). Several such historical and cultural plays emerged from the École William Ponty students. Although these plays were 'censored' by their teachers to ensure that they were not critical of the colonial administration but instead derogated their indigenous cultures, École William Ponty remains the most influential factor in the development of modern Francophone-African theatre, producing some of the region's most distinguished dramatists and theatre practitioners, such as Fodeba Keïta, the Guinean founder of Theatre Africain, the first professional African troupe in Paris.

At the Horn of Africa, in Ethiopia, modern theatre was introduced by Tekle Hawariat, a nobleman who lived in Europe for many years. His play, *The Comedy of Animals* (c.1921), was very critical of the government and resulted in a ban on drama. This ban was lifted by Haile Selassie in 1930. Selassie then made drama a significant cultural tool for promoting his administration. Unlike other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopian theatre developed with no direct influence from Europe. It was mainly performed in the local language. Nonetheless, those who truly developed modern Ethiopian theatre, like Tsegaye Gebre-Mehdin and Tesfaye Gessesse, were trained in Europe and America.

These early theatrical engagements anticipated both an ideology and a framework that became critical commonplaces in the emergent modern African theatre. Examples include Sekyi's innovative use of English and Fante, and his deployment of popular comic conventions in his satirical attack on the Ghanaian elite's slavish imitation of English culture in *The Blinkards*; Oloyede's folkloric style which Ogunde inherited and developed; the historical and cultural convention of the École William Ponty school, which became commonplace in later Francophone theatre; and the anti-establishment critique in Hawariat's *The Comedy of Animals*, which echoed in the emergent Ethiopian theatre, resulting in Gessesse's incarceration in 1975.

However, those who are conventionally identified as the first generation of modern African dramatists, and who demonstrably embodied the innovative robustness of the modernist spirit, include Efua Sutherland and Joe de Graft in Ghana; Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark in Nigeria; Guillaume Oyono-Mbia in Cameroon; Bernard Dadie in Côte d'Ivoire; Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya; Ebrahim Hussein in Tanzania; Robert Serumaga in Uganda; Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Tesfaye Gessesse in Ethiopia; and Sarif Easmon in Sierra Leone. Most of these dramatists had a strong Western education, were self-consciously nationalistic, formally experimental and sophisticated – especially in their thematic choices and ideologies – and synthesized their received knowledge of Western drama with their inherited indigenous performance traditions. Through a positivist recuperation of indigenous history, performance idioms, cultural institutions, and social contexts, they applied themselves to forging a modern African theatre. Some of the most influential works from this group include Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), Joe de Graft's *Through a Film Darkly* (1970), Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* (1961), Guillaume Oyono-Mbia's *Trois prétendants...un mari* (1964) (*Three Suitors... One Husband*), Bernard Dadie's *Beatrice du Congo* (1971), Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The Black Hermit* (1963), Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjekitile* (1977), Serumaga's *Majangwa: A Promise of Rains and a Play* (1971), Gebre-Medhin's *The Oda Oak Oracle* (1965), and Gessesse's *Iqaw* (1975).

Many of these dramatists taught in their national universities and also engaged in professional and semi-professional theatre practice. Efua Sutherland, for instance, founded the Ghana Drama Studio Players in 1957 and also worked at the University of Ghana in Legon. De Graft worked in the Studio and the University of Legon. Wole Soyinka worked at the Universities of Ibadan and Ife in Nigeria, and founded the 1960 Masks in Ibadan. Clark taught at the University of Lagos and founded, with his wife, Ebun Clark, the PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos. Oyono-Mbia taught at the University of Yaounde. Bernard Dadie was involved with, and wrote for Cercle Culturel Folklorique de Côte d'Ivoire. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a professor at the University of California, Irvine, and engaged actively in community theatre. Robert Serumaga was a consummate theatre practitioner and founded Abafumi Players in 1971. Ebrahim Hussein was a professor of drama at the University of Dar es Salaam. Gebre-Medhin was director of Ethiopian National Theatre and the Department of Theatre Arts at Addis Ababa University, which he founded and also worked in as a professor. Gessesse was director of Ager Fikir Theatre and also professor of theatre at Addis Ababa University.

The succeeding generation of modern African dramatists is distinguished by their intense social consciousness and commitment to making a more 'authentic' modern African theatre. Like European modernists, they are critical of their predecessors' ideology and style. They privilege more populist forms and language, and endeavour to make a theatre that addresses the material African context, often using the oral resources of indigenous theatre and adopting the perspective of the common people. As Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh observes, this generation sees in the works of their predecessors 'a kind of literary and artistic prostitution with the west, abandoning any attempt to communicate with their immediate audiences' (2001: 26). In Nigeria, for instance, Soyinka and his generation were accused of lacking a progressive social vision and positing a rather uncritical adulation of history and tradition. Yemi Ogunbiyi charges them of possessing a tragic worldview, 'a cynicism which sometimes lacks the compassion and hope which ought to accompany our perception of reality' (1981: 33). However, this criticism pertains only to some dramatists and some works. Efua Sutherland and Guillaume Oyono-Mbia, for example, deployed indigenous theatrical forms in their commitment to making a people's theatre. Similarly, Soyinka displays in his later works a more materialist concern with the fate of common citizens in the wake of corrupt and militarist dictatorships and democracies in post-colonial Africa.

Some of the most prominent members of this second generation of African dramatists include Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande in Nigeria; Zakes Mda in South Africa; Mohammed Ben-Abdallah and Yaw Asare in Ghana; Nicole Werewere Liking and Bole Butake in Cameroon; Sony Labou Tansi in Congo; Bernard Zadi Zaourou in Ivory Coast; Rose Mboya in Uganda; and Francis Imbuga and David Mulwa in Kenya. Some of the most notable works from this generation include Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* (1999), Sowande's *A Farewell to Babylon* (1978), Mda's *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1980), Ben-Abdallah's *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (1982), Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* (1994), Werewere Liking's *La Puissance d'Um (The Power of Um)* (1979), Butake's *The Survivors* (1989), Tansi's *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (1985) (*The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez*) (1995), Zaourou's *L'Oeil (The Eye)* (1974), Mboya's *Mother Uganda and Her Children* (1986), Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1975), and Mulwa's *Glasshouses* (2000).

Like their predecessors, most of these dramatists also taught in their home universities and engaged in semi-professional and professional practices. Femi Osofisan, for instance, is an emeritus professor of theatre arts at the University of Ibadan where he also ran a semi-professional company. Bode Sowande is a professor of theatre arts and founder of Odu Themes Meridian, a professional theatre company. Ben-Abdallah taught at the University of Ghana, Legon. Werewere Liking is an active theatre practitioner and founder of Ki-Yi Mbock theatre group. Bole Butake is an emeritus professor of drama and African literature at the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon. Tansi founded Rocado Zulu Theatre, Congo's leading theatre company. Zaourou was an active practitioner who founded Didiga, an influential theatre company which experimented with ways of making modern African theatre. Mboya was a professor in the Department of Music, Dance and Drama at Makerere University, Kenya. Imbuga was a professor of literature at Kenyatta University. Mulwa is a popular television and theatre actor and also teaches theatre arts at Kenyatta University.

Developmental theatre, often known as theatre for development (TfD), evolved with this generation of African theatre practitioners out of the early initiatives to make theatre accessible, meaningful, and productive to the general urban and rural populations. This kind of theatre privileges self-development by engaging rural or urban communities in making theatrical experiences using themes evolved from and by community members. This tradition of applied theatre, which began in the 1970s, proliferated across the continent in such countries as Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mali. The most popular of these developmental theatre initiatives include the Laedza Batanani popular theatre in Botswana, the Kamiriithu community project led by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya, the Maratholi travelling players in Lesotho, and the Samaru project of the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria.

However, the most prolific, but also the most diverse – and ideologically, stylistically and thematically disconcerting – crop of modern African dramatists is the present generation of young people who do theatre in today's difficult and crisis-riddled Africa and its diaspora. Naturally, this is also the most understudied. This is due not only to their diversity but their newness. They are still largely evolving. This generation, comprising dramatists born mainly from the mid-1960s, began writing around the early 1980s. This group is perhaps the most modernist in the manner in which it embraces a diversity of styles and themes, ranging from conventional drama through all forms of theatrical experiments, often involving mixed-media projects in dance, mime, drama, and music. What sets its members apart from their predecessors is their bleak, almost fatalistic social vision – their disaffection with the failure that has become the fate of the African continent. Thus, they seem enamored of social decay, political violence, poverty and other challenges. Osofisan underscores this predilection in contemporary Nigerian writing generally: 'the numerousness of abuse and cruelty, plus, correspondingly, the near absence of joyful endings, the dearth of sparkling laughter and stainless mirth, of moments of companionship clean of treachery' (2011: 3). He concludes that 'in nearly all of them, pain and bestiality haunt the inexorable landscape' (6). Prominent among these dramatists and theatre practitioners are Segun Adefila and Esiaba Irobi in Nigeria, Gcina Elsie Mhlophe, and Ian Fraser in South Africa.

As I already noted, modernist theatre has, in diverse ways, insinuated itself into modern African theatre. While some of these insinuations are direct, some are rather

tangential. There is, for instance, abundant evidence of individual modern European dramatists' influence on particular modern African dramatists. The most influential remains Bertolt Brecht whose ideology suited the social materialist vision of modern African dramatists, and whose dramaturgy echoed the African indigenous performance and reception modes, which they inherited. Brian Crow acknowledges 'the widespread creative and critical perception in Africa of the close affinities between Brechtian Epic Theatre and indigenous performance traditions that have profoundly influenced modern African literary drama' (2009: 190). African dramatists have variously adapted Brecht's plays, especially *Threepenny Opera*, and many have been described as Brechtian in their technique and materialist social vision. Such dramatists include Wole Soyinka, Ebrahim Hussein, Ben Abdallah, and Rose Mboya. Apart from Brecht, other influences include Constantin Stanislavsky and Samuel Beckett on Robert Serumaga, and Alfred Jarry on Wole Soyinka and Jane Taylor.

This attempt at identifying some kind of generational regimes, where we have the first, second, and third generations of modern African theatre traditions, is often merely discursive. In reality, such binaries – whether temporal, stylistic or thematic – are often misleading. In Nigeria, for instance, Olu Obafemi observes 'generational gaps and near-confusion of categories' (1986: 265) in the manner in which the Soyinka generation became, from the 1980s, 'political, topical and partly revolutionary' (269), while the Osofisan generation sobered their materialist vision in favour of a more mythical and metaphorical reading of material reality. The notion of an aesthetic and ideological divide between the first and second generations of Nigerian dramatists erodes rapidly (272–3). Similarly, quite a number of contemporary African dramatists engage both themes and techniques identified with the first and second generations.

Modern African theatre emerged out of the confluence of European and indigenous African performance traditions. It evolved a dialectical relationship to its imposed European model as well as its inherited African performance idioms. Being neither a wholesale recuperation of indigenous traditions nor a total imitation of the European model, modern African theatre is a median category which deploys European frameworks and indigenous African performance traditions in forging a new form that addresses modern African material and aesthetic concerns. Modern African theatre emerged in response to a turbulent reality and adopted avant-gardist aesthetics, charting a new path but utilizing tools from traditions it radically challenges and embraces – both Western European and indigenous African. Thus modern African theatre is modern and counter-modern; neo-traditional and counter-traditional.

NOTES

1. South Africa became independent from British colonial administration in 1910, but the white minority population installed the nefarious racist apartheid regime which subjectified the black majority population. Both Liberia and Ethiopia were never colonized. Liberia was founded in 1847 comprising slaves rescued from British and American slave ships, while Ethiopia successfully resisted European colonists.

2. Amkpa describes this as ‘a modernity semantically, culturally, and politically synonymous with European values and institutions [...] was inherently hierarchical in that it assumed the natural superiority of European mores over those of the subdued “natives,” and therefore the legitimacy of the West’s mandate to govern the colonized’ (2004: 5).
3. Many scholars of African culture adopt a dichotomizing regime, which separates Sub-Saharan Africa from North Africa on the premise that the latter is culturally Arabian. Although the justification for this habit is questioned by many, I adopt this popular perspective here.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MODERNISM IN AFRICANIST ART HISTORY

The making of a new discipline

—♦—
Prita Meier

When the academic sub-discipline of Africanist art history was first established in the 1960s, its pioneers focused almost exclusively on ‘traditional’ and ‘pre-modern’ arts. Most scholars studied African art in terms of anthropology, taking the arts as expressions of cosmology, belief, and communal identity. Yet by the late 1980s, new avenues of analysis started to emerge. Scholars engaged post-colonial criticism, interrogating the hegemonic assumptions that worthwhile African cultural production must conform to a vaguely defined category of the ‘traditional’. Scholars and critics began reconsidering how to write about nineteenth- and twentieth-century African arts without resorting to Eurocentric assumptions about Africa’s fundamental ‘otherness’. They focused on Africa’s contemporaneity via tradition’s opposite: its modernity. By the late 1990s the study of African art and visual culture had been radically transformed. Now much scholarship focuses on academically trained artists whose work is studio-based, urban, and avant-garde. Themes like subject formation, independence struggles, post-colonial nationhood, and neoliberal crisis are emphasized. Many African and diasporic artists are celebrated globally; they are the focus of major exhibitions and academic monographs. Artists such as Ibrahim El Salahi, El Anatsui, Yinka Shonibare, and Julie Meheretu are considered central to the history of global modernism.

This chapter considers how Africa’s engagement with modernity has moved to the forefront of art historical scholarship. It traces how scholars, curators, and critics have connected modernism and modernity to the African experience, and how ‘African modernism(s)’ has become a field of study.

AFRICAN MODERN ART

The focus on modernity in African art history was inaugurated by Johannes Fabian’s seminal work exploring the power of temporal concepts – ‘traditional’, ‘primitive’, and ‘tribal’ – to dislocate Africa from the rest of the world in Western intellectual history. He called this the ‘denial of coevalness’, or the refusal to see Africa and the West as sharing the same temporal plane.¹ Africanists began to assert that colonial and independence era arts must be analyzed vis-à-vis the socio-political experience of

time. This major intellectual shift was spearheaded by Nkiru Nzegwu, John Picton, Salah M. Hassan, Okwui Enwezor, Elizabeth Harney, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Kobena Mercer, Rasheed Araeen, Sylvester Ogbechie, Olu Oguibe, and Sidney Kasfir, among others. Initially they focused on artists like Farid Belkahia, Skunder Boghossian, Uzo Egonu, Chike Aniakor, Uche Okeke, El Anatsui, Rachid Koraichi, Ernest Mancoba, and Ibrahim el-Salahi – artists who deployed the visual language of high modernism, such as pictorial and sculptural abstraction, to capture the socio-political revolutions of the independence struggle, *c.* 1950s to 1970s. All these artists grappled with

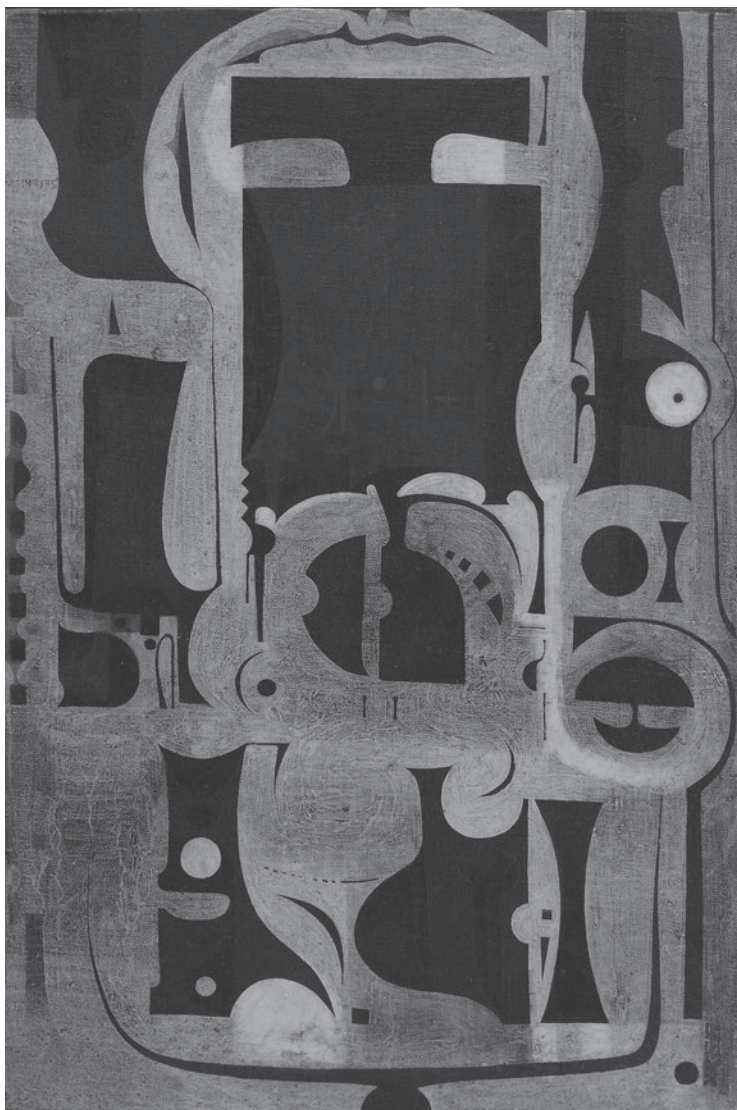


Figure 23.1 Ibrahim el-Salahi, *They Always Appear* #4, 1964–5, oil on canvas, 18 x 12 in. Purchase 2014 Contemporary Art Society of Great Britain Fund TR25.2014. © Ibrahim El-Salahi. All rights reserved, DACS 2014.



Figure 23.2 *Ana Mmuo (Land of the Dead)*. Uche Okeke, born 1933, Nigeria 1961. Oil on board, H x W: 92 x 121.9 cm (36 1/4 x 48 in). Gift of Joanne B. Eicher and Cynthia, Carolyn Ngozi, and Diana Eicher 97-3-1. Photograph: Franko Khoury. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

presenting their work as both nationalist and internationalist. Artists at the Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria and the Department of Fine and Applied Art at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka devoted themselves to creating art and philosophies that would be understood as distinctly Nigerian, yet also connected to global avant-garde practice. These artists and curators worked in a typical modernist mode: they reimagined ‘Indigenous’ or pre-colonial vernacular ideographic sign systems like *uli*, *nibidi* and *adire* as expressions of modernist abstraction. The use of recognizable African imagery and writing systems was important because such a synthesis of ‘old’ and ‘new’ was understood as both radically modern and free of Western influence. Much of the art created at Nsukka and Zaria during this period existed at the interstices of pure abstraction and indigenous figuration or ideographic writing.

Artists in Africa’s large cities dedicated much of their practice to a similar synthetic project. They wanted to create a form of modernism based on what had been labelled local ‘tradition’. They, like most modernist artists working, perceived a difference between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ cultural production. Yet, unlike Western modernists, they wanted to create work anchored in their perceived traditions. Modern visual culture was linked to the West, and artists whose work was simply modern risked being viewed as insufficiently African or nationalist. Thus, a generation of Ethiopian artists who trained at the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa focused

on transforming iconic Ethiopian symbols, such as Ethiopic script, into a new language of painterly abstraction. Painters associated with the ‘Khartoum School’, including Osman Waqialla and el-Salahi, transformed Arabic calligraphy’s formal and symbolic properties into modernist forms in large-scale easel paintings. They aimed for work that could be read as both pure abstraction and celebrating Arabic script as the ancient visual language of the Sudanese people.

All these artists exhibited across Africa during the post-independence period. Many also travelled abroad, studying in the Middle East, Europe, and North America, where their work was supported by NGOs and governmental organizations, though their work was not exhibited in major art museums in the West until the 1990s. Two important exhibitions introducing African modernists to a larger audience were *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (UK, 1996) and *Contemporary African Artists: Changing Tradition* (United States, 1990). These projects focused on aesthetic issues: how African artists created a modernist visual style. Other exhibitions, such as *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–94* (United States and Germany, 2001), presented modernism as a political field. This show and its accompanying book also emphasized African modernism as a tactic of rebellion against colonization. The issue of African authenticity connects all these exhibitions. Scholars and curators who worked on these exhibitions wanted to avoid showing the appropriation of Western pictorial forms and ideas by Africans as an unbounded cultural practice or, worse, derivative. They argued that African artists ‘localized’ Western approaches, creating works that are recognizably African. The curators of these exhibitions unsurprisingly echoed the artists’ concerns, since many of them studied or taught at the first centres of African modernist art.

More recently, scholars have moved beyond concerns about authenticity to document why modernism became so important during the struggle for independence and early post-independence nation-building. Elizabeth Harney’s groundbreaking *In Senghor’s Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (2004) inaugurated the study of African modernism in relation to a detailed analysis of local socio-political events. She focused on how different generations of Senegalese artists deployed ‘European modernist visual techniques and aesthetic concerns’ over several decades vis-à-vis the production of a national identity (2004: 12).

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

The pioneers of the study of African modernism have radically shifted the field in new directions, making visible artists who had been dismissed as imitating European modernism. Yet, studies of ‘African’ modernism and modernity are accompanied by ideological anxiety. A key problem is that Africanists are intent on linking modernity to a bounded place, and that they often de-historize modernity as a positive value: it is ‘good’ to prove Africa was modern, or to point out African artists are as ‘avant-garde’ as their European counterparts. Such positions are important because they force audiences to reconsider assumptions about Africa and Africans. Yet, scholars have not yet considered the ideological underpinnings of creating the study of African modernism and modernity.

African art history emerged from the 1950s ‘area studies’ paradigm, intended to ‘give voice’ to formerly colonized regions and redress North American academic

Eurocentrism. It was also part of the Cold War surveillance apparatus. As such, it inadvertently entrenched the assumption of a constitutive relationship between culture and place, further naturalizing the modern concept of autochthony. Area studies research focuses on transregional interconnectivity, but it interprets relationships among things and peoples in territorial terms. It imagines place-based cultural authenticity as the precursor to cross-cultural engagement. Thus, African art history is locked into the modernist map of world culture, where non-Westerners cross space and Western culture changes through time.

Africanists arguing for the study of ‘African’ modernity effectively continue working within area studies, inadvertently placing Africa outside the universal claims of modernity. The geographic marker ‘Africa’ in a story about modernity appears illogical because modernity can only name an exterior, a non-modern ‘other’. Studies of ‘African’ modernism seek to make modernity contradict its foundational narrative: they narrate particularity and universality simultaneously. This would be progressive, but modernity as set in place by nineteenth- and twentieth-century social philosophers cannot accommodate such a reading. Studies of ‘African’ modernism claim place-based particularity, while modernity emphasizes temporality and can only account for a placeless modernism.

As Walter Mignolo points out, the Enlightenment project of modernity is not a phenomenon, like industrialization, but a conceptual apparatus created by an imperial culture when an interconnected world system began to manifest thanks to the global expansion of capitalism. As an epistemic framework, modernity is unequivocally Euro-centred, since ‘the outside [colonized/other] is named from the inside [colonizer/Europe] in the exercise of the colonality of power’ (Mignolo 2002: 62). ‘It requires an alterity, a referent outside of itself – a pre- or nonmodern in relation to which the modern takes its full meaning’ (Trouillot 2002: 222). Those judged too different become ‘non-modern’. Modernity is so compelling because it claims to be a planetary system. It belongs to a bundle of terms that Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls ‘North Atlantic universals’ conceived in the West, but describing a placeless and universal experience. They are ‘always seductive, at times even irresistible, exactly because they manage, in that projection, to hide their specific – localized, North Atlantic, and thus parochial – historical location’ (221).

Yet, even though modernity is a conceptual apparatus for global engagement created by an imperial culture, it remains popular in art historical scholarship because modernity’s comparative approach yields an effective tool to counter the silencing of Africa’s global presence and impact. It legitimates imagining a globally interconnected community, and therefore also a potentially empowering paradigm to critique the marginalization of difference and otherness (see Pratt 2009).

HISTORIES OF THE MODERN

African artists embraced modernism because it presents art as a ‘universally’ relevant form that can close the gap between modernity’s promises and modernization’s social realities (i.e. colonialism and racism). As a creative practice, modernism has been immensely generative for African and diasporic artists. With its bundled concepts of rationality and universal rights, modernity can help the marginalized force their recognition as rights-bearing members of a planetary community. While different places

and times refigure European thought to produce locality, part of that strategy depends upon being seen as ‘modern’ (Chakrabarty 2008). When early twentieth-century residents of cities like Calcutta or Shanghai embrace modernity they ‘are not naive, they are not unaware of its Western origins, its colonial designs, its capitalist logic, and its global reach’ (Gaonkar 2001: 21). Their embrace is not marked by anxiety over losing ‘one’s culture’ (21). Rather, making things modern gives residents ‘license to play with form and refigure function according to the exigencies of the situation’ (21).

From a practical artistic perspective, modernity and modernism signify interrelated frameworks, positions, and performances most often anchored in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the mid nineteenth century, artists began rejecting the idea that art must be in a period ‘style’. Instead, they began freely appropriating forms from other periods or places to create ‘original’ works. Such a manoeuvre characterizes the historical avant-garde:

Historical avant-garde movements [...] did not develop a style. There is no such thing as a dadaist or surrealist style [...] these movements liquidated the possibility of a period style when they raised to a principle the availability of the artistic means of past periods.

(Bürger 1984: 18)

This artistic rebellion against convention intended to contribute to ‘real’ revolutions. Artists used artistic techniques including montage, performance, assemblage, abstraction, and vernacular and mass media forms to shock viewers. Their techniques critiqued nineteenth-century aestheticism and institutions of the status quo. They dedicated their practice to shattering the perceived autonomy of the work of art, rejecting the very category of ‘art’. The individualistic self is posited as the source of the work and thus appropriation not as a passive recipient of influence, but as the source of radical invention. This discourse continues the Renaissance formulation of the ‘genius’ artist who creates unique works of art that express his or her essence. The artwork’s ‘authenticity’ was not defined by the end product, and did not have to be anchored to an artist’s place of origin, but was guaranteed by the artist’s vision. Contemporary post-colonial artists continue to play with notions of authenticity, using it as a site of critique.

The historical relationship between art history and modernism is critical. ‘Modern’, in the visual arts, was first applied to works created by artists in late-nineteenth-century European imperial metropolises. Modernist art was scripted as a critique of modern life, where the modern self seeks an antidote to the managed routines of industrialization and commoditization through anti-rational and anti-establishment forms of expression. The Western idea of African primitivism became a major source for these strategies. Artists like Henri Matisse, Hannah Höch, Paul Klee, and Pablo Picasso absorbed ideas about Africa’s otherness. Artists found the staging of African peoples and objects at universal expositions and ethnographic museums particularly transformative.² Hence, a major paradox of the avant-garde: it sought to shock bourgeois culture and transgress norms, yet it relied upon primitivism, which was enabled by colonialism. Scholars have recently considered how celebrating the imagined alterity of non-Western art colluded with colonialism, and how colonialism facilitated artistic appropriation.³ While colonialism and imperialism were multi-

faceted, their knowledge-production projects policed imagined divisions amongst civilizations. Images and objects were used to create a hierarchy of racial and cultural ‘types’ based on evolutionary models, with North Atlantic peoples at the apex and ‘non-Westerns’ lower down.⁴ Visual schemas became tools for managing colonial and imperial interventions in Africa: the colour illustrations of the many anthropological publications featuring photographs of African peoples produced easily digestible information about them. Images helped naturalize ethnic and racial taxonomies, and presented forms of dress and adornment as expressions of racial difference. Such taxonomies proliferated because the potential for ‘unacceptable intermingling’ increased as the interconnectivity engendered by global capitalism brought more and more cultures into physical proximity.⁵

Matisse, Höch, Klee, Picasso, *et al.*’s reframing of African images and objects as a platform for a primitivist critique of modern life is well documented.⁶ Their cosmopolitan positionality aimed to signal a transnational consciousness, where Africa’s cultural difference and exoticism represented a site of counter-identification to the nation-state. A more radical position argues that primitivism aestheticized colonial exploitation, making it a source of pleasure and fantasy and constructing the colonized as a resource for rejuvenating the West.⁷ The production and celebration of primitivist aesthetics by European artists and intellectuals visualized and concretized emerging concepts about essential cultural difference. Appropriating African formal elements ratified popular tropes about these cultures’ unfettered expressiveness. Artefacts collected in the colonies were no longer just imperial trophies; they served social and cultural purposes, catalyzing aesthetic contemplation and the renewal of the modern self.

Nineteenth-century art history was also keenly concerned with charting art’s progression through the ages and reworking the concept of style to contribute to emerging understandings of ‘universal’ human history. Art historians such as Johann Winckelmann, Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, and Josef Strzygowski employed racist ideas to delineate supposed material and symbolic divisions between societies. According to this model, the difference between Germans and Italians could be determined with reference to essential stylistics of their respective arts, understood as a product of climatic difference.⁸ The concept of influence is central to mapping style across time and space. It makes comprehensible the relationship among artists and art enclaves. The analytic framework of influence hinges on a hierarchical relationship between the borrower and the source, with the influenced work as inferior.⁹ Stylistic taxonomies dominated in the study of African visual culture, where discrete ‘tribes’ were presented as producing distinct styles.¹⁰ This legacy still frames African modernist artists, as they are expected to make art expressing an authentic link to their place of origin, in precise contrast to the kind of authenticity expected of the Western avant-garde.

THE CANON AS STRATEGY

Another aspect of Africanist modernist art history is the recourse to canonical methodologies. Writing a chronology of continuities and discontinuities is a long-established art historical manoeuvre, which creates discrete schools and movements. It brings a canonical *art history* into existence. Thus, identifying the *first* modern artist in

an African nation is hugely important. Much of the scholarship on modern Nigerian art charts – and vigorously debates – various ‘firsts’. For example, scholars argue over whether the Zaria or Nsukka school is more significant to the founding of Nigerian modernism and whether Aina Onabolu or Ben Enwonwu should be called the first modern Nigerian artist.¹¹ For many art historians, such as Chika Okeke-Agulu and Olu Oguibe, it is important to insist that modernism was not introduced by the West; rather, indigenous pioneers such as Aina Onabolu and Prince Yusuf Kamal campaigned to bring fine art courses to their secondary education curricula.¹² Onabolu was ‘not merely mimicking Europe’ by painting academic naturalist portraits of Nigerian elites (Oguibe 2002: 246). Rather, Onabolu ‘was also beginning to define his idiom as a vehicle for translating and reinstating his own heritage into new forms in the context of changing reality of Africa’ (246). The focus on origins, originality, and artistic individualism also articulates an unacknowledged scholarly ambivalence regarding the artists’ relationship to their African identity. Scholars want these artists to be recognized as neither derivative nor identical with their North Atlantic counterparts, since this would simply fold them into modernity’s totalizing schema of world culture.

Accounts of artistic individuality and originality also inadvertently produce anxieties regarding the quality of work created in ‘other’ spaces, since it can be cast as derivative of European work. The art historical valuation system that valorizes originality also privileges formal innovation. The influenced artist is marginalized. African modernists deployed Western media, such as easel painting and photography, and modernist formal strategies, such as pictorial abstraction and re-imagined ‘vernacular’ or ‘native’ forms. Yet these re-imaginings play a different role in African modernism vs. Western modernism. The ‘folk’ mark articulates an authentic African essence; it expresses the artist’s relationship to the land, contra Western modernist appropriations, which often borrow vernacular imagery from diverse cultures to critique bourgeois values.

CONCLUSION

Scholarship on African modernism(s) exposes the complex struggles, desires, and achievements of artists once dismissed as unworthy of study. Yet it still depends on unexamined formulations of modernity and modernism. Critics, curators, and art historians rarely examine modernity as a mode of seeing and thinking. Theorists such as Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, and Achille Mbembe importantly emphasize modernity’s plurality. Gilroy’s theorization of the Black Atlantic as a site of ‘hybrid’ modernity inspired many to write about African modern art’s expression of multiple modernities. But unpacking the epistemological foundations of modernity is still marginal for Africanist art historians. Questioning the logic of modernity as an analytic framework will produce more complex interpretations. A critical approach to modernity would allow scholars to explore why the search for an ‘authentic’ African or national expression has been so important. It would make rigorous distinctions amongst terms like modernism, modernity, and authenticity as deployed by artists in various periods, and the use of these terms as discursive frames of interpretation. New work must contextualize cultural practices in precise localities and histories, and capture how artistic practices make claims within a shifting web of new and old forms of territoriality. Modes of questioning can then enter a different

terrain. There, the central agenda would not be to position artists as authentic Africans and ‘original’ moderns. Rather, one could unfurl the complex contradictions and tensions activated once modernity meets different sites of enunciation. Analysis would then move out of triumphal modes of narration and relish fractious work that ‘fails’ and is not coeval.¹³

NOTES

1. On coevalness as an intellectual strategy, see Fabian.
2. The most well known of these encounters is Picasso’s visit to the Trocadéro in Paris, where he ‘discovered’ the geometric power of African sculpture. German expressionists in Berlin also regularly visited colonial expositions, in particular African and South Seas peoples, even bringing them to their studios as models.
3. See Foster, Hiller, and Lloyd.
4. See Clifford; Coombes; Fabian; Karp; Karp, Lavine, and Rockefeller Foundation; Phillips and Steiner; and Price.
5. See Young on fears of ‘racial amalgamation’ in colonial spaces (1995: 4).
6. See Benjamin and Lemke.
7. See Jameson for a landmark account.
8. See Kaufmann’s discussion of the lasting impact of nineteenth-century art historians, such as Alois Riegl, who spearheaded the project of defining art in spatial terms (2004: 43–83).
9. The concept of stylistic and artistic influence has been much critiqued by art historians (see Baxandall). Partha Mitter aptly calls this the ‘pathology of influence’ in his call for a new art history that would decentre the canon of modernist art (2008: 538). He also points to the fact that in the colonial context the engagement with Western strategies of artistic expression by South Asian artists was even more starkly read as derivative by colonial art historians.
10. These disciplinary concerns are discussed in Blier, Kasfir 1992 and 1984, Okeke, and Phillips and Steiner.
11. See Nicodemus, Ogbachie 1999 and 2009, Okeke, and Oguike.
12. ‘Modern African art became a reality not so much because of Western-style education as because of a few individuals to whom art as an autonomous practice became a medium for expressing their subjectivity’ (Okeke 2001: 29–30). On Onabolu’s careers, see Oguike.
13. Theorists like Achille Mbembe, Walter Dignolo, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Édouard Glissant put forth ‘non-coincidence’, ‘border thinking’, ‘de-territoriality’, and ‘non-commensurability’ as discursive practices. Their work critiques the notion of coevalness and highlights the complex relationship between culturally variable spatial and temporal concepts when they meet in the spaces of empire.

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PART IV

AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA



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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE EXPERIENCE OF ABORIGINALITY IN THE CREATION OF THE RADICALLY NEW Modernist intellectual currents in Australasia¹



David Macarthur

Why is primitivism so alluring?

Barbara Creed (2008: 64)

In this chapter I consider the intellectual and imaginative currents driving modernism in Australia.² Australians were once taught that their articulations of modernism were pale, isolated, and belated reflections of European modernism, a provincial cliché that has since been countered by the equally clichéd patriotic affirmation that there were ‘myriad connections between Australian artists and global modernist art’ (White 2011: 109). There is no doubt some truth in both positions depending on which aspect of the art-scene one considers, but in so far as the conditions for modern art are not defined in terms of national identities the whole idea of a distinctively Australian modernism is called into question.

If one is looking for something distinctively Australian to say about modernism, one response to acknowledging the more or less global historical conditions relevant to the creation of modernist art – late Romanticism, the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of megalopolises, etc. – is to look to the embattled reception of modernism in Australia amongst artists, critics, and curators. Terry Smith speaks of ‘[modernism’s] relatively passive reception’ in the Australian milieu (2008: 394) and Michael Ackland remarks, ‘modernist literary trends had been slow to make a major impact locally’ (2000: 74). Indeed, the struggle over the acknowledgement and acceptance of modernist art became a matter of public concern in Australia: the outcry over the award of the 1943 Archibald Prize to William Dobell; the exhibition of modern art in department stores (e.g. David Jones, Myer Emporium) rather than traditionalist art museums; and Norman and Lionel Lindsay’s public campaign against modernism (cf. Hunt 2003). But, again, these are local instances of a global phenomenon.³ It is internal to modernism to problematize its relation to its audience so here, too, there will be little to say that is regionally specific.

Instead, I take another route to the idea of an Australian modernism, where the issue concerns less national identity, and more how modernism is inspired by so-called ‘primitive’ cultures. I use the terms ‘primitive’ and ‘primitivism’ in a resolutely non-pejorative sense akin to that employed by the MOMA exhibition ‘Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern’: ‘The term “primitivism” is used to describe the Western response to tribal culture as revealed in the work and thought of modern artists’ (MOMA 1984). Given that the exhibition paired works of modernist artists with various tribal artefacts (e.g. a Paul Klee painting and a Zuni war god effigy), this statement is perhaps most naturally taken to mean that a sub-class of modernist artists adopted ‘primitivist’ strategies, where ‘primitivism’ designates a distinctive artistic style or form or content ‘imitating’ (in various senses) primitive cultural artefacts.⁴ But I take seriously another possible interpretation of this passage: the more radical hypothesis that modernist art *as a whole* is a Western response to tribal culture. Australasian modernism is to a large but indeterminate extent a Western response to Aboriginal culture. The justification for applying the term ‘primitivism’ here is not primarily a matter of artistic style, form, or content but, more fundamentally, of artistic motivation or inspiration. This is the heterodox sense of the term that I employ throughout.

This claim is not as outrageous as it might initially seem. Indeed some have connected the source and vitality of art-making in general with the primitive. For instance, the modernist sculptor Henry Moore has written, ‘All art has its roots in the “primitive” or else it becomes decadent’ (1964: 146). Without defending this global thesis, we can at least enlist Moore as an ally of the vision of modernism defended here: an attempt to restore vitality and unprecedented forms of significance and intelligibility to art in the modern era by engaging with the primitive. This claim’s plausibility about the origins of modern art depends on two important caveats: (1) that the Western response to tribal culture may be largely *imaginative* in so far as one can have a powerful engagement with a tribal culture without (genuinely or fully) understanding that culture or its artefactual output; and, particularly in the Australian context, (2) the response to tribal culture can be a response, imaginatively mediated, to the *land* that the indigenous population once or now inhabits and was dispossessed of by colonial settlers. Let us consider these points in turn.

At issue is the modernist late-romantic search for revolutionary newness in art and the role the experience of ‘the primitive’ – perhaps a largely imaginative experience – plays in creating the conditions for its realization. To see primitivism in this sense as a (the?) primary source of Australian modernism, and a possible answer to the modernist problem of the radically new in art, provides an alternative to the Eurocentrism of the vast majority of discussions of Australian modernism. The Australian example may even lead to a re-conception of the relation of modernist art generally to ‘primitivism’, which is often treated as merely one influence among others. Perhaps an engagement with the ‘primitive’ really is the primary source of the radically new in art, as Moore suggests.

Of course, we do know that some very influential European modernists found in native African and Islander artifacts new sources of creativity.⁵ To give one notable and conspicuous example, consider the dependence of Picasso’s early masterpiece *Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J.)* on African masks that he observed in Andre Derain’s studio in Paris. Another striking example is the series of late paintings of Paul Gauguin who,

justifying his escape from Europe to Tahiti, writes: ‘Artists, having lost all their savagery, having no more instincts, one could even say imagination, went astray on every path, looking for productive elements which they did not have the strength to create’ (1968: 86). Recovering one’s savagery is Gauguin’s metaphor for creating art anew through exposure to the primitive. In this case it included introducing colours, optical effects, and energetic forms of non-European art into his work. But these matters of detail are inessential to the main point – for each artist has to find what counts as the ‘productive elements’ of his or her art. There is no single relation (appropriation? inspiration? disorientation?) in which the white (scientific, technological) and black (‘primitive’) cultures stand to each other.

The conditions for art-making that Gauguin achieved by leaving Europe for Tahiti were available to Australian modernists in their own backyards, but the effect in both cases was the same. They were confronted with an acute experience of otherness, which provided them with the ‘productive elements’ they needed to render new artistic expressions appropriate to the modern age. The issue need not be seen as one of creating ‘a vital hybrid in which white and black cultures have formed something entirely new’ even if such a hybrid is the inevitable outcome of the interaction of these cultures (Lemke 1998: 144). Modernism is largely a matter of the imaginings of ‘white culture’ confronted with a ‘black culture’ it did not understand.⁶

Even if we suppose that Australian modernism is understandable as a global reaction of Western culture to the primitive (admittedly, a controversial claim), that does not diminish the importance of the fact that the conditions for Australian modernism were present in their most potent form not in Europe but in Australia itself. Primitivism provided the possibility of a radical reimagining of artistic possibilities precisely in allowing an escape from Europe and the dominant tradition of European art – including, say, Classical, Christian, Renaissance, and Romantic periods. Perhaps a confrontation with Australian otherness made available a rejection of the entire tradition of Western art and its obsession with the search for more and more perfect simulacra of nature. To imagine another past of tribal culture – say, a new relation to nature – thus became a necessity.⁷

Standard art historical writing on Australian modernism tends to trace the lines of influence between European and Australian modernism, only differing in the complexity and directionality of the lines. Painting is typically treated as the paradigmatic art form, so great significance is placed on local innovations such as Norah Simpson’s introduction of Parisian approaches to colour and formal abstraction on her return to Sydney in 1913, and the bearing this had on fellow painters such as Roland Wakelin, Grace Cossington Smith, and Roy de Maistre. Moreover, the move to abstraction in painting appears as a general tendency towards an emphasis on ‘form’ in art.⁸ Without slighting the factual basis of this Eurocentric historiography of modernism, I focus instead on examples of Australian artists and artworks that represent a new beginning through some – perhaps indirect, partial, or unacknowledged – appreciation of the newness (or unanticipated difference) of the Australian Aborigines and the landscape they inhabited from a white perspective.

Viewed in terms of the conditions for creating a new beginning, the problems confronting modernist artists in Europe and Australasia were almost exactly opposite. In Europe the problem was to create new beginnings in a world burdened with the

past: a world of ancient cities, royal families, aristocrats, old religious divisions, timeworn institutions, a long history of wars and racial and class conflict, etc. In Australia, however, none of this applied. In a sense settlers had no past. Everything was so new – the landscape, its ‘emptiness’, its Indigenous people, and the openness of the future – that people couldn’t see what was right in front of them. Notoriously, early colonial painters could not paint the plants or animals without making them look European. Nor could they do justice to the vast scale of the landscape, or properly acknowledge its Aboriginal inhabitants and their manner of inhabiting and shaping the land. The sublime difficulty of appreciating the newness of Australia – its great difference from anything white people had ever experienced or imagined before – is an important inspiration for Australian modernism at its best.

Modernist landscape painters like Grace Cossington Smith, Elioth Gruner, Dorrit Black, Hans Heysen, Margaret Preston, Eric Thale, Rah Fizelle, Roy de Maistre, and Roland Wakelin, found inspiration in the natural and man-made Australian environment. Whether they realized it or not, they responded to a landscape imaginatively experienced as Aboriginal, as if imbued with an ancient and alien spirit or intelligence beyond their comprehension – an experience D. H. Lawrence powerfully expresses in *Kangaroo*.⁹ So, too, the Jindyworobak literary movement promoted an Indigenous literature based on a response to the land modelled, in this case openly, on that of the Aborigines. Peter Conrad expresses the relevant conception of spirit of place well when he says that Australia’s Aboriginal inhabitants ‘had no conception of a house and treated the earth itself and the stories it told as their unwallled, roofless home’ (2003: 11). City-dwellers on the densely populated urban fringe of the country are subject to a sense of guilty possession, expressed in how recurring themes of the bush and the desert haunt our collective imagination, including that of some of our finest artists: Arthur Boyd, Russell Drysdale, Joseph Furphy, Sidney Nolan, and Fred Williams.

The primitivism of many modernist artists is not a matter of self-conscious artistic influence, but rather of how the confrontation of a white colonial population with a non-European ‘other’ – by way of an engagement with the land, lore, and artifacts of the Australian Aborigines – created the conditions for the artistic discovery of the radically new. This is not to say that this opportunity was always taken, or that there was not a good deal of modernist art in Australia inspired by, or derived from, European models, including the surrealist-inspired paintings of Albert Tucker, the Bauhaus-inspired architecture of Harry Seidler, and the Russian Constructivist-inspired photography of Max Dupain and Wolfgang Sievers. But these models themselves are, arguably, also examples of primitivism.

Since it is impossible to make this argument satisfactorily in a short chapter, I have chosen three well-known and enigmatic examples of Australian modernism. Examples can never establish a general claim beyond all doubt but the theme of primitivism runs through them all. These examples represent a larger trend but they do not sum up Australian modernism as a whole. Apart from the question of other trends and influences, there will always be artistic geniuses that are unique and not easily categorizable in general terms (e.g. Colin McCahon, Peter Grainger). But they do provide a plausible case for a new vision of the conditions for the new in Australian modernism.

THE ERN MALLEY POEMS

In 1943 Max Harris received a parcel of poems from one Ethel Malley, who claimed they were penned by her brother, Ern, who had died tragically at the age of 25. The poems were, in fact, a literary hoax, concocted in a day by James McAuley and Harold Stewart to parody the experimental poetics of modernism: a radical surrealist technique involving chance association, random sampling of miscellaneous texts (e.g. Shakespeare's *Pericles*), a dictionary of quotations, and an army report on the breeding grounds of mosquitoes. The following year the poems appeared in the *Angry Penguins* magazine series under the editorship of Max Harris, who regarded them as the work of an unsung Australian genius. Here a fictitious young white man with an Aboriginal name ('Mallee') is associated imaginatively with experimental modernist poetry at its most unfettered.

The name 'Malley' is carefully chosen. It is an Aboriginal word for a straggly chaotic bush – a poor cousin of the Eucalypt family – that grows abundantly in semi-arid regions. One can point to the theme of disorderliness, but there is also the theme of creation: out of chaos comes a new order; out of the desert arises a new being or beginning. Is it just a coincidence that a word with these connotations chosen by the two prankster poets comes from the Aboriginal lexicon? Perhaps we can look to another poet for the answer, though Xavier Herbert's novel *Capricornia* (1938) or Patrick White's novel *Voss* (1957) would serve as well. From the poem 'Australia' (1943) by A.D. Hope (1961: 100) one reads,

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

MARGARET PRESTON'S LATE PAINTINGS

After an apprenticeship in Europe in the 1910s, Margaret Preston experimented with colour and pattern in an attempt to achieve an aesthetic balance between representation and abstraction. What is of interest in the present context is her paintings of the 1940s which adopt the colour palette, styles, and designs of Aboriginal painting: a palette of black, white, ochre, bush green, etc.; bold outlines around objects such as trees; and the use of repetitive dot or line elements. It has been said that her most significant revelation is that 'Aboriginal art was a form of spiritual connection to and knowledge of the country, expressing both concept and place' (Edwards 2013: 222). A related but deeper thought that comes closer to capturing Preston's sense of place – which we might speak of in terms of the expressive power in everyday things – is that the land itself can be understood, by those sensitive enough to see it, as expressing a sense of Aboriginality, the imaginative interpenetration of the land and Aboriginal

culture; hence a new vision of our culture. Some might see this as a move towards a nationalist modernism but it need not be understood as a contrasting vision to those who see modernism as an international project ‘quite independent of the question of nationality’ (Edwards 2013: 17).¹⁰ Instead it could be understood as seeing the deep connection between primitivism and the modernist obsession with discovering the radically new.

We might wonder why it is a female painter that most openly acknowledges the Aboriginal source of her creativity. Stanley Cavell (1996) has argued that modern skepticism is inflected along gender lines. The male mind tends towards a world-denying abstraction, the female towards a world-embracing concreteness. Accordingly, one might contrast Preston’s late landscapes with Roy De Maistre’s early abstract colour works. And one might further wonder whether the modernist obsession with de-contextualized form expresses, as one theorist puts it, ‘a crisis in phallogentric culture’ (Foster 1985: 46).¹¹

THE OPERA HOUSE

The Opera House is our most iconic work of modernist architecture. Originally designed by a Danish architect, Jørn Utzon, everything about its history tells us a great deal about the power of art to inspire both retrograde and progressive social and political forces, as well as the difficult reception of modern art in Australia. Utzon won an international design competition to build the Opera House after the head of the judging team, Eero Saarinen, arrived on the judging panel late. The other judges had winnowed the entries down to a final few but Saarinen found the designs of these finalists unsatisfactory. It was he who pulled the winning entry out of a rubbish bin, and had the force of presence to bend the panel’s collective mind in its favour. The design impressed many people with its blending of the precision and poetry of its spherical forms with the apparent symbolic referencing of sailing boats on the harbour.

For our purposes what is most significant about the design is that it was inspired by ancient Mayan temple construction, which rose in stepped pyramids above a forest canopy (cf. Frampton 2003). Here the stepped temple is replaced by an opera theatre and the forest canopy by the waters of the harbour. But the idea is essentially the same. Surely the appropriateness of this use of ancient architecture was inspired by Utzon’s experience of the Australian landscape and, specifically, this particular place of ancient Aboriginal inhabitation. Of this site an architectural historian writes, ‘Bennelong Point was a most important Aboriginal site, upon which a number of very large shell monuments once stood’ (Myers 2000: 80). Utzon would have known something about Bennelong Point’s Aboriginal history. More intriguing is whether he knew that this was a site of Aboriginal constructions – monumental shell middens – which the early settlers burnt for lime in kilns at the harbour’s edge.¹²

Australian modernism is an extended meditation on questions and paradoxes of sameness and difference: the search for a new beginning (difference) for art capable of expressing revolutionary perceptions of modernity but one still recognizable as art (sameness). From the first contact of white settlers in Australia the opposition between native (tribal culture) and settler (transposed British culture) was being transformed and overcome. The modernist idea of the primitive is a myth; but it is a myth that

played a powerful role in stimulating artists to discover the savage in themselves (as Gauguin put it), and thus to create the conditions for modernist art. No doubt this helps to explain why some of the best modernist art Australia has produced is set in a mythical bush or desert landscape, such as Nolan's unforgettable Kelly series of paintings. And it leads one to wonder whether the Australian jeremiad against a sense of isolation is also a myth. Perhaps Australian modernists wanted to be isolated, to cast themselves as victims of isolation, victims of history, in order to provide the freedom from Europe to be something other to themselves, something truly modern.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Jane Goodall and Stephen Ross for their comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. The title of the chapter refers to 'Australasia' for a reason: central aspects of what I say about Australian modernism apply to New Zealand modernism too, given the confrontation of white settlers with the indigenous Maori population. However, given limitations of space I will focus exclusively on the Australian context.
3. For example, the rejection of Duchamp's 'Urinal' from the exhibition of the Society for Independent Artists (1917), and the outcry over Le Corbusier's urban plans for Paris, e.g. the *Plan Voisin* (1925).
4. Arthur Danto (2003) has criticized the MOMA exhibition – whose pairings of primitive artifacts with modern artworks were based on certain visual similarities – as naïve and uncomprehending. His point is that these aesthetic similarities provide no access at all to the meaning of either modernist or tribal artifacts, not even whether the latter could be properly considered works of art. But such criticisms, however effective against the rationale of the MOMA exhibition, have no bearing on my own appeal to primitive culture here since I do not claim that the Western response to such cultures is anything more than a matter of imaginative inspiration.
5. See Gates (1997) for an argument for the dependence of European modernism on African art.
6. Sometimes the influence is conspicuous (e.g. Margaret Preston, Peter Sculthorpe), and an artist may have a genuine understanding of the significance of the communal life of Aboriginal artifacts (e.g. rock and bark paintings, totems, wood carvings, tattooing and body painting).
7. To cut off all connection with the past one would not create something new but, rather, something unintelligible.
8. The emphasis on form to the exclusion of external reference in art has been taken as the heart of modernism. For this reason the prominent Australian art critic Bernard Smith (2007) prefers to call it 'the Formalesque'.
9. The legal doctrine of *terra nullius* is understandable as a case of what Sigmund Freud calls repression. It denies what settlers all know or feel, that the land was Aboriginal land and that our presence here meant displacing its original inhabitants. This sense of moral and political unease motivating a failure of acknowledgement is well registered in E. Phillips Fox's 'The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770' (1902), which depicts Cook claiming the land for the British Empire whilst an officer tries to draw his attention to the Aborigines on the hill above.
10. Presumed to be Roland Wakelin.
11. Foster is referring to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, but the point is generalizable.
12. Could it be mere chance that the smaller theatres of the Opera House echo these structures that are reputed to have been as much as 12 metres high?

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

INDIGENOUS CONCILIATIONS WITH AMERICAN MODERNITY

Architecture and design in Oceania



Davina Jackson

The key catalyst for modernist architecture and design in Australia and the Pacific is the American Frank Lloyd Wright. His 1906–9 Prairie Houses, influenced by Japanese *ukiyo-e* ('floating world') woodblock prints and centuries of Japanese and Korean building precedents, became key references for the Asia-Pacific stream of organic architecture that has been labelled 'indigenous modernism' (more below). Wright's first influence dates to 1911, when two of his staff, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, won an international competition to design the new Australian capital city: Canberra. The Griffins' radial, car-friendly plan caused English architect Edwin Lutyens to change his layout for New Delhi, India's Raj-era capital. Although the building styles were different, both cities prototyped British philosopher Ebenezer Howard's 1898 town planning concept: 'Garden Cities for To-Morrow'. Howard's concentric diagrams, defining modern cities as clusters of activity-specific zones, continued to influence town planners until zoning began to be discredited in the 1960s. The Griffins worked extensively in Australia from 1912 to 1935, using Wright-style motifs in sandstone houses at their Castlecrag bush subdivision on Sydney's north shore, and interpreting Japanese landscape, theological, art, and architecture traditions. Their concepts diffused across Asia and the Pacific, peaking with the 'indigenous modern' movement exemplified by luxurious Amanresorts by Australian architects Peter Muller and Kerry Hill in Bali, Malaysia, and Singapore during the late 1980s and 1990s. These followed many examples of flamboyantly roofed hotels and houses built on Hawai'i, Tahiti, New Caledonia, Fiji, and other colonized Pacific islands served by commercial air services after the late 1950s.

During most of the twentieth century, barriers of distance and cost framed the development of Australian and Pacific architecture and design. For example, thatching, which tied structures to traditional building practices and used local materials, was more feasible than heavy roofing materials shipped from afar. Distance also blocked conversations and rivalries among global innovators. Small populations and economies often discouraged investors from tooling up factories to mass-produce mechanical or electrical products. With those constraints, artists and designers in Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific localities had to wait to learn about significant innovations. Ideas arrived mostly by sea mail as grainy photographs in

home design magazines and architectural books. Images in the *Architectural Review* (UK), *Arts and Architecture* (US), and *House & Garden* (US and UK) and fine art magazines stimulated readers to copy, adapt, and interpret the latest concepts for comfort, convenience, and status. For example, the late 1940s Australasian fashion for timber chairs (some branded ‘the Snelling line’), with criss-cross webbing backs and seats instead of padded and quilted upholstery, were diminished copies of early 1940s American versions of finely crafted bentwood chairs designed by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto in the early 1930s. Neither the Americans nor antipodeans could emulate the plywood steam-bending processes that Scandinavian craftsmen perfected in the early twentieth century, so they sawed curved frames from flat ply panels.

Australasian architects and designers’ isolation led to independent local development and relatively clear lines of international influence. Each Pacific nation developed local themes influenced by talented individuals, available education, technologies and materials, and government regulation. Many artisans around the Pacific were inspired by their local climates and natural environments, depicting native flowers, birds, animals, and landscapes on public artworks and handmade home furnishings. Some responded to the crafts and traditions of natives, e.g. Australian home products curved like Aboriginal boomerangs. Others turned to the Arts and Crafts Movement, stimulating 1920s fashions for loom-woven textiles, glazed pottery tiles and kitchenware, and rugs in Art Deco and cubist patterns.

From the 1920s, Hollywood films became the most infectious conduits of novel concepts. In many Asia-Pacific settlements, cinemas (at least their facades) were designed as symbols and magnets for local society. ‘Going to the pictures’ influenced people to consume new kinds of lifestyle-enhancing merchandise – all advertised via various publicity techniques that initially promoted films. After the Second World War, ideas influencing modern Pacific coastal living continued to issue from the western United States, especially California. American architectural historian Mark Jarzombek coined the term ‘Good-Life Modernism’ to explain how designers led new tastes after the 1930s depression, two world wars, and the effects of totalitarian regimes in Russia, China, and their allied states (1990: 76–93).

Throughout the twentieth century, pan-Pacific design has evolved via transfers of personal skills, interests, and belongings among migrants, labourers, travellers, seamen, performers, and traders. Each culture uniquely fused international styles with local materials and traditions. For example, Australia’s greatest modern textile designs were created in Sydney during the 1960s and 1970s after extensive European and Asian travels by artist Florence Broadhurst. Her flamboyantly naturalistic (Japan-inspired) patterns in metallic inks and tropical colours are still printed to order for prestigious European fashion and furnishing designers.

AUSTRALIA

After the First World War, Australia’s first professor of architecture, Leslie Wilkinson, arrived from London to establish a faculty at the University of Sydney and develop its campus. Inspired by Georgian and Mediterranean architecture, he revived Australia’s colonial buildings and opposed radical reforms to Beaux Arts teaching. Sharing his approach were William Hardy Wilson in Sydney, Walter Bagot in

Adelaide, and Robin Dods in Brisbane: all dominant architects until after the Second World War.

Sydney and Melbourne became Australia's key cities in the 'Battle of the Styles' that resulted from 1920s European white cubic responses ('the hygienic house', 'machines for living in', 'the International Style') to Wright's earthy ('natural house' and 'organic modern') prototypes.^{1,2} Before European modern architecture emerged in Australia in the mid-1930s, idealistic architects looked to Spanish Mediterranean, British Arts and Crafts, and Austrian Art Nouveau styles (and their Californian updates) for residences, and to late nineteenth-century Chicago and New York neo-classical buildings for multi-storey commercial blocks.

Australia's first Euro-modernist buildings appeared in the 1930s in Sydney and Melbourne: Art Deco houses and commercial buildings with streamlined curves (inspired by Eric Mendelsohn) or ziggurat geometries, and functional blocks (influenced by Willem Dudok). Key Melbourne projects included Yule House by Oakley and Parkes (1932), Burnham Beeches by Harry Norris (1933), the Macpherson Robertson Girls High School by Norman H. Seabrook (1933–4), Mercy Hospital by Stephenson and Meldrum (1935), and the Newman flats (1941) and Stanhill flats (1942–50) by Frederick Romberg. In Sydney, key projects included works by the Griffins, Emil Sodersten's City Mutual Life Assurance Building (1936), and Birtley Towers (1937) and Marlborough Hall (1938) blocks of flats in Elizabeth Bay. A young employee of Sodersten's, Sydney Ancher, produced the liner-style white Prevost house (1937).

Australia's first stellar example of the International Style was the Rose Seidler house in Killara, 1949, by Austria-born, America-educated architect Harry Seidler. Strongly influenced by his former US teacher, Marcel Breuer, this residence was followed by many other significant modern houses, towers, and commercial buildings until Seidler's death in 2006. Sculpturally bold, with geometrically orthogonal forms (often painted white with accents in primary and secondary colours as favoured by the Bauhaus school), these included the Rose, Marcus Seidler, and Glass houses (1949–57); Ithaca Gardens apartments (1960); Blues Point Tower (1961); Australia Square tower (1961–7); the Harry and Penelope Seidler house (1966–7); the MLC Centre (1972–5); the Harry Seidler offices and apartments (1973–94); Grosvenor Place (1982–8); Capita Centre, 9 Castlereagh Street (1984–9); Horizon Apartments (1990–8); and the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre (2001–7). His key buildings in other Australian cities included the Edmund Barton Building, Canberra (1970–4); Riverside Centre, Brisbane (1983–6); Shell House, Melbourne (1985–9), and QV1, Perth (1987–91).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Sydney and Melbourne architects expressed the ideological debates between organic and international modernism by blending features of both from American and European originals.³ The main 1950s followers of Wright were Peter Muller, Douglas Snelling, Neville Gruzman, and Bruce Rickard in Sydney; and Robin Boyd, Frederick Romberg, and Roy Grounds in Melbourne. From the mid-1950s, a younger generation was influenced by British 'new brutalism' and new Scandinavian architecture: Ken Woolley, Russell Jack, John Allen, Peter Johnson, Bryce Mortlock and Colin Madigan in Sydney; and Peter McIntyre, John and Phyllis Murphy, and Kevin Borland in Melbourne.

Commercial buildings, where Seidler's modernist approach dominated from the 1950s to 2000, favoured the International Style by using polished instead of rustic

materials or ‘soft’ tones and finishes. Seidler’s 1950s rival Snelling promoted Wright’s organic theories via ‘integrated’ gardens in reception foyers and boardrooms. In the late 1950s, increasing heights of lifts and fire ladders caused relaxations of building height regulations. Modernist commercial towers with curtain walls (panels suspended from the edges of floor slabs) arose in Sydney (Hartford Fire Insurance building by Douglas Snelling [1953], the MLC Building by Bates Smart and McCutcheon [1957], and Unilever House by Stephenson and Turner [1957]) and Melbourne (Shell Corner by Buchan Laird and Buchan [1958–60], and ICI House by Bates Smart and McCutcheon [1957]).

In the 1970s and 1980s Australian architecture increasingly found its own style and exercised influence abroad. In 1975, Australian architecture turned from the ‘nuts and berries’ concepts of exposed brick and stone with dark-stained timberwork to using steel, glass, and white-painted internal walls. Although there had been sporadic examples of Mies-style steel and glass houses, notably the Lucas house in Castlecrag (1957), the genre became globally influential with Sydney architect Glenn Murcutt, after widespread publicity of his Marie Short house, Terrey Hills (1975), and other ‘touch the earth lightly’ pavilions until the 2000s.⁴ Murcutt’s use of weather-responsive, sensor-controlled louvres anticipated eco-sensitive adaptations. Apart from Murcutt’s works and the development of a new ‘Sunshine Coast School’ of architects designing light, steel-roofed ‘shed’ houses in Queensland, in the 1980s Australia’s mainstream architects appeared retrospective (via ‘post-modern neo-classicism’) and negative about the potential of computers to redefine design



Figure 25.1 Rose Seidler House, Wahroonga NSW, Australia. Architect: Harry Seidler. Designed 1948, completed 1950. Photo (1950–1): Harry Seidler. Since 1991, the house has been a museum managed by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW–Sydney Living Museums.



Figure 25.2 Infinity pool at 'Tahiti', Kelly House 2, Sydney, Australia, by Douglas Snelling 1965–6. Photograph: Max Dupain.
Image courtesy of The Estate of Douglas B. Snelling, architect.

practices (causing anger among 'box' designers against computer drawings of 'blobs'). In Melbourne, younger architects expressed themselves with radical designs for nightclubs, commercial interiors, and houses. These competed with clashing colour palettes and geometrically complex and irregular compositions.

The 1990s saw Aboriginal architects emerge as significant contributors to Australian architecture, consolidation of the growing international influence of Australian designs in major projects, and an Olympics-driven building frenzy centred in Sydney. Australia's first registered Aboriginal architects began to practice under the name Merrima. With the New South Wales Government Architect, they designed contemporary timber and brick buildings with Japanese-inspired timber battening, emulating some then-prominent Queensland architects, including Brit Andresen, Peter O'Gorman, and Donovan Hill. They rejected the neo-gothic, middle-European naturalism (mud bricks and undulating black roofs) of several 1990s Aboriginal cultural centres designed by non-Aboriginal Melbourne architect, Greg Burgess. In Sydney, some large firms (notably Hassell, Woods Bagot, Cox, and Peddle Thorp) prospered in the new markets of Asia and the Middle East, while younger practitioners (including Burley Katon Halliday and Engelen Moore) established an international movement to revive International Style modernism as 'white box minimalism'. This approach was enabled by precisely machined metal components such as door hinges, 'invisible' window frames and 'almost nothing' door handles. Advanced metal fabrication systems also enabled rapid delivery of steel-clad stadiums, tourist centres, and sports venues supporting the Sydney Olympics, including works by Hassell,

Bligh Voller Nield, HOK, Cox Architects, Peddle Thorp, and Denton Corker Marshall. All were influenced by Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, and Japanese modernists such as Kenzo Tange, Fumihiko Maki, Arata Isozaki, and Tadao Ando, who developed minimalist versions of the ‘tin shed’ (airport hangar) and ‘concrete bunker’ approaches to public buildings during the 1980s.

Modern Australian design echoed architecture’s combination of foreign and local influences. Before the Second World War, most artists and artisans highlighted local landscapes and cultures: native flora and fauna were popular subjects. Post war, Australian designers became increasingly interested in foreign fashions and furnishings: Melbourne’s Grant Featherston was the most original 1950s–1960s interpreter of modern furniture trends. Importer/retailers of original home wares, especially Artes Studios and Marion Hall-Best in Sydney, shaped tastes in the 1950s and 1960s. Talented migrants such as Paul Kafka, George Korody, and Steven Kalmar perpetuated Old European cabinetmaking skills.

NEW ZEALAND

During the early twentieth century, European trends and Chicago-style neo-classicism influenced New Zealand’s notable architecture. Public buildings, commercial centres and flat blocks were diverse but often shared vertically proportioned window-door arrangements: e.g. designs by William Gummer, and Grierson Aimer and Draffin in Auckland; William Gray Young in Wellington; and Cecil Wood in Christchurch. Art Deco architecture revitalized Napier after a 1931 earthquake destroyed the town. Interpretations of late-1920s European white modern architecture appeared in New Zealand cities before the Second World War, including H.L. Massey’s ocean liner-influenced Cintra Flats in Auckland (1937), cubic Wellington Provincial Centennial Memorial (1940), and Humphrey Hall’s Park Lane residence in Timaru (1938). With the Second World War, Jewish refugees arrived from Europe, the most talented being Ernst Plischke, who joined the Department of Housing and Construction and designed the Frankel house in Christchurch (1939). Plischke impressed his colleagues with skilled interpretations of northern hemisphere precedents for rooflines, window styles, floor-planning, landscape/building relationships, colours and finishes, and features such as fireplaces and built-in furniture.

Mid-century New Zealand architects were influenced by American styles and debates. Because timber is more plentiful, economical, and practical than brick or stone in earthquake-prone New Zealand, architects did not express Frank Lloyd Wright’s ‘organic’ approach as directly as did some of their Australian counterparts. However, mid-century architects such as English expatriate Vernon Brown in Auckland and England-experienced Paul Pascoe in Christchurch, as well as Humphrey Hall and Charles Fearnley, combined white and black-brown (creosote-stained) weatherboards with white-framed windows. John Allingham’s bluestone and shingles house in Dunedin (1949) achieved another kind of synthesis, including a white spiral staircase leading to a white timber balcony above a carport lined with white pilotis (round columns). From 1949 through the early 1950s, Auckland collective Group Constructions (the Group) built several influential new houses, demonstrating single-pitched roofs with internally exposed beams, sliding glass doors, open cabinets as room dividers, clerestory windows, and long, low, main elevations.

After the tentative experiments of the 1930s to 1950s, New Zealand welcomed a new generation of more confident neophyte modernists in the mid-1950s, including London-experienced Miles Warren in Christchurch (Dorset Street Flats [1956–7]) and Prague-born Vladimir Cacala in Auckland (Blumental House [1957] and Kay house [1960]). For housing, they favoured large, bright indoor–outdoor living areas with white walls, light timber and exposed brick walls.

From the mid-1960s to early 1990s, many of New Zealand’s most significant public and commercial buildings were designed by (Miles) Warren and Mahoney in Christchurch, including Christchurch Town Hall (completed 1972), University of Auckland Student Building (1973), Christchurch College (1964), Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington (1982) and the mirror-glazed Television NZ building (1989). These conformed to basic modernist structural principles that were internationally mainstream by the 1960s.

During the 1970s, Auckland architect Ron Sang (of Fairhead, Carnachan, and Sang) built several Wright and Neutra-inspired Californian style houses, using dark brickwork with lush landscaping. In Wellington, Roger Walker and Ian Athfield replaced the rules of the International Style with more idiosyncratic, irregular, and complex forms (particularly roofs and massing) and cellular rather than open room planning. Through this period of budget-constrained experimentation, New Zealand produced two icons of late modernism: the Beehive, a circular ziggurat added to Wellington’s Parliament House complex, and Auckland’s gracefully curved West Plaza tower.⁵

During the 1980s and 1990s, young Auckland architects Pip Cheshire, Pete Bossley, and Noel Lane were widely published leaders of ‘post-modern’ architecture, ‘quoting’ concepts from diverse sources including Wright’s decorative houses, Le Corbusier’s fluid concrete gestures, and tribal art. The most controversial example of this ‘pastiche’ approach is the Te Papa Museum in Wellington, designed by JASMAX and opened in 1998. Other Auckland architects, including David Mitchell and Marshall Cook, interpreted organic modern concepts from northern California (Arts and Crafts) and Los Angeles (including Mediterranean-style) precedents.

Mid-century New Zealand furniture design featured hand-made craftings from plywood, emulating 1930s Scandinavian originals. During the mid-1950s, some casual and outdoor furniture was made in novel styles from Los Angeles, with steel tube frames and slung canvas seats, moulded plywood, or woven bamboo. Leading furniture firms founded during this period included Backhouse, Airst, Brenner Associates, Broadhead Bros, Garth Chester, D.A. Lewis, J.D. Morgan and Fowler, and Drummond and Waddell. With increased prosperity from the late 1940s, several showrooms opened in Auckland selling locally made furnishings inspired by modern international styles, including Patrick Pierce’s The Art of the Potter (studio ceramics by Peter Stitchbury, Len Castle, Barry Brickell, and others pursuing British, Scandinavian, and Japanese precedents), and furniture retailers John Crichton and Jon Jansen (selling works by local Dutch designers Edzer Roukema and Jan Knoll and by Sydney-based Snelling and Melburnian Grant Featherston).

Designers and artisans in the 1960s favoured subtle, naturalistic, Scandinavian or Japanese tones, textures and motifs for tableware, a trend exploited by the Crown Lynn production pottery company. An opposing theme clashed bright colours for mosaic tabletops or murals, Marimekko-style screen-printed cotton

fabrics, and gloss-painted Victorian timber furniture. Several Auckland-based home and fashion magazines published up-to-the-minute concepts and demonstration settings in colour – and popular Australian and English magazines were available by sea mail.

INDONESIA

Dutch colonial buildings on the island of Java were Indonesia's finest early twentieth-century precursors of indigenous modern architecture. Initially made from local timbers with European-inspired features, late colonial buildings were stripped-down European classical masonry structures with climate-responsive plans (long houses), vernacular (pagoda-adapted) thatched roofs, large windows, verandahs, porticos, ventilation louvres, and decorative woodwork using tribal motifs.

Because Indonesia was a Dutch dominion until 1945–9, its key Javanese cities boast fine 1920s and 1930s public buildings in modern styles. Key architects included Albert Aalbers (DENIS bank [1936] and the Savoy Homann Hotel [1937]) and C.P.W. Schoemaker (St Pieter's Church [1921] and Villa Isola [1932]). Henry Maclaine Pont's Institute of Technology, Bandung (1920), noted for its multi-tiered roof inspired by the Minangkabau traditions of Sumatra, pioneered local traditional influences on Dutch architecture.

Following independence, Indonesia's first President Sukarno commissioned international styling for new modern cultural icons in Jakarta during the 1950s and 1960s, including the 1965 Parliament building and conference hall complex by Soejoedi Wirjoatmodjo (Suyudi), with winged forms inspired by Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal in New York; the Gelora Bung Karno (formerly Senayan) Stadium by Büro Happold (1960–2); the Istiqlal Mosque by Frederich Silaban (1978); and four high-rise hotels. Second President Suharto's government, elected in 1967, reversed course by sponsoring substantial showcases of indigenous modern architecture: the Tandjung Sari Resort, Bali, by Wija Wawo Runtu (1962 onwards), and the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah theme park (1975). Both featured pavilions with vernacular styling. By the 1980s, most public buildings were functional blocks with traditional features, including exaggerated multi-tiered 'pagoda' rooflines.

Indonesia, especially Bali, also was a springboard for the post-1970s indigenous modern movement for upmarket resorts. Key Bali examples include the Bali Hyatt Hotel, Sanur, by Palmer and Turner (1973); the Bali Club Med by Noelle Janet and Christian Demoncey (1988); the Amandari resort, Ubud, by Peter Muller (1989); and the Amanusa, Ubud, by Kerry Hill (1992). Indonesia's cities now boast many high-income houses and commercial towers of modernist, indigenous modern, and post-modern (often neo-Art Deco) styles. Many were sheathed with mirror glass to reflect the tropical sun.

Indonesia's key twentieth-century design advances came from new international and cross-tribal influences in crafting textiles (especially wax-dyed batik fabrics), wood, and stone (including sculptures and wall murals). Applied decorations were influenced by new international styles in graphic design, screen-printing, painting, and sketching on papers, textiles, and timbers.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

Pacific cultures have fragile balances between local traditions and imported architectural concepts. From the mid twentieth century, these contrasts were blended via ‘tiki style’ or ‘indigenous modern’ pavilions, styled like tribal huts. Key examples were designed by Westerners wanting antidotes to the twentieth century’s dehumanizing mechanization, including ‘concrete jungle’ cities.

While traditional architecture in Melanesia, Indonesia, and New Guinea was influenced by Buddhist temples from India to China, Polynesian islands did not have many visually notable or intentionally long-lasting structures until after commercial air travel launched their tourist industries in the late 1950s and 1960s. Such travel and tourism encouraged Pacific governments to display examples of economic prosperity, stable governance, respect for history, and cultural vibrancy. From the 1950s onwards, governments collaborated with European, American, and Australasian entrepreneurs to develop hospitality and commercial services and local crafts.

Most surviving twentieth century buildings on South Pacific islands represent indigenous modernism because limited funds, skills, and materials, and local politics did not allow technically advanced foreign innovations. Some notable examples include the Nuku’alofa Club, Tonga, by H. Monl (1914); the Old Fono reconstruction and new Maoto Fono Legislative Buildings, in Apia, Western Samoa, by the Public Works Department (1971 and 1975); the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation Forum Secretariat, by Architects Pacific in Suva, Fiji (1976–94); the Paiyembit Cere-monial House, by local builders, in Palimbei Village, Sepik River, Papua New Guinea (1978); the Radio Station by Ancher Mortlock and Woolley, in Honiara, Solomon Islands (1982); Parliament House, by Peddle Thorp and Harvey with the PNG Government Architect, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (1984); and the Parliament of Fiji, by Vitia Architects with the Fiji Government Architect, in Suva (1992).

OCEANIC TRIUMPHS

The Pacific region’s most outstanding modern architectural works are the Sydney Opera House (Danish architect Jørn Utzon 1957–66, completed in 1975), and the Jean-Marie Tibaou Cultural Centre in Noumea, New Caledonia (Italian architect Renzo Piano, completed in 1998). Both contrast raw concrete interiors with handcrafted monumental shell forms. Piano’s architecture – with timber battens alluding to local tribal garrison fence posts – aimed for comparison and contrast with Utzon’s gleaming nests of white tiled ‘orange segments’ (spheres are a universal form) in Sydney. Both allude to billowing sails and crystallize the same miraculous dream: buildings that float, poised to fly.

NOTES

1. ‘The Battle of the Styles’ refers to visually expressed arguments among architects about the merits of style decisions inspired either by Wright’s post-1900 ‘organic house’ principles, or post-1920 European and east coast American ‘International Style’ interpretations of Wright’s prototypes, which usually demonstrated more cubic than horizontal proportions and white-painted masonry walls, and often featured steel frames containing floor-to-ceiling expanses of glass.

2. These expressions emerged in 1920s writings by European architects (especially Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture: Guiding Principles*, 1993 [1920]), who linked architectural design concepts to science, technology, and manufacturing advances that supported the increasing economic and social power of a new middle class.
3. See Boyd.
4. Glenn Murcutt's phrase 'touch the earth lightly' shares an ideal from nomadic tribes that humans should leave few permanent traces on the land. See Drew.
5. The Beehive was sketched by British architect Sir Basil Spence in 1964 and completed in 1982 by the Government Architect's Office and Ministry of Works. The West Plaza Tower was completed in 1974 by Price Adams Dodd.

FURTHER READING

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

MODERNISM AND FILM IN AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Australasian experience



Anthony Lambert

THE REGIONAL STORY

This chapter interrogates and articulates some of the influences of modernism, modernity, and modernist thinking within the development and experience of cinema in Australia, New Zealand, and proximate Pacific Islands. Such an endeavour necessitates a return to the familiar business of grouping together countries, technologies, histories, and aesthetics in terms of a regional experience. As I have written elsewhere, regarding the use of a term such as Australasian to this end,

The troublesome aspects of the ‘Australasian’ provide wide and liberating passages for the excavation of shared (and specific) regional, geographical, linguistic, historical, technological and colonial/post-colonial experiences as they shape and are shaped by screen production. Cinematic and televisual representations and industrial practices further delineate the ongoing effects of colonial history as well as transnational cultural and economic power, influence, exchange and dialogue.

(Lambert 2013: 4)

It might also indicate a ‘blanding out’ of modernist elements across cultures as they apply to film. In the case of modernism, modernity, and modernist aesthetic, and discursive production, the regional liberation to be drawn from an examination of Australia, New Zealand, and some of the surrounding Island nations, precisely *as Australasia*, is in the identification of the particular and peculiar regional relations between ‘the modernist’ and the development of film. In short, through cinema, what modernisms do we find in Australasia?

If modernism, as Kuhn and Westwell suggest in the context of Western cinema, is a ‘term applied retrospectively to a wide range of avant-garde trends [...] of the early to mid-twentieth century, involving an embrace of cosmopolitanism and a rejection of nineteenth century realism’, the application of modernist understandings to Australasia complicates historical location of the cosmopolitan/modernist binary (2012: 269). This commentary offers not a survey of modernist film in the Australasian

region, but an idea of how the movement towards modernism and modernity positions it within the historical regional context. Such considerations speak to and against conventional connections between historical modernism and film production, found in many film studies and histories to be ‘aspects of modernist sensibility’ that ‘were enthusiastically embraced, explored and experimented with at the time – in filmmaking, in film criticism and in encounters between the two’ (269).

This classical/modern tension lends itself to grouping core areas as distinctly ‘modern’ technological, aesthetic, critical, and social phenomenon. Moving explicitly to Australia and the Pacific, and taking the experience of modernism and modernity in/of film to reflect cultural politics, I canvass briefly the associated themes of the ‘vernacular’, the ‘technological’, and the ‘discursive’. This relocation of the more general scholarly terms of the film-modernism dynamic is underscored by the suggestion that ‘multideterminate’ approaches more effectively ‘guide our understandings of the complexities of the technologies of cinema and their use in concrete, historically specific contexts’ (Petrie 2000: 17). Thus, the modernist experience of cinema in Australia, New Zealand, and the surrounding Pacific Islands can be usefully framed by Miriam Hansen’s suggestion that ‘cultural practices that articulate and mediate’ modernity, constitute a ‘vernacular’ modernism; a combination of ‘everyday usage, with connotations of discourse idiom and dialect’ (1999: 60).

VERNACULAR STORY

Hansen sees no immediate ‘problem with importing’ the opposition between classicism and modernism characteristic of modern literature, architecture, and visual arts, ‘with classical cinema falling on the side of tradition and alternative film practices on the side of modernism’ (1999: 62). Simultaneously, she reframes the study of film and modernism with attention to the contextual nature of modernism and modernity in film:

If, however, we consider the cinema as part of the historical formation of modernity, as a larger set of cultural and aesthetic, technological, economic, social, and political transformations, the opposition of classical cinema and modernism, the latter understood as a discourse articulating and responding to modernity, becomes a more complicated issue.

(1999: 64)

Modernism’s flexibility as an organizing principle of regional cinema begins to reveal itself. Gesturing to these ‘larger cultural transformations’ in the Antipodes, and moving beyond the classical/modern divide, Adrian Martin suggests,

we think of the poetics of avant-garde film as largely an open system, one in which different experiments (on the planes of style, effect, structure, reference) should not only be confined to a single a priori function or orientation. Only such a sense of openness and potentiality will guide us to the heart of the richness of individual works [...].

(1989: 176)

As part of his ‘traditions of Australian avant-garde film’ in 1970s and 1980s Australia, he isolates ‘the romantic-imagistic tradition’ in which

it is possible to consider the history of artistic modernity throughout the twentieth century, with its various overlapping movements – dada, surrealism, *art brut*, pop art, abstract impressionism, neo-expressionism – between the extreme points of another continuum. At the one end are those practices engaging in some ways with the images received from the dominant cultural environment (movies, television, paperback novels, etc.); at the other, art which is concerned to produce a fresh vision, new images. It is this second impulse that I would designate as ‘romantic’ in quite a traditional sense. Romanticist-derived philosophy thrives mightily throughout the international history of avant-garde cinema.

(Martin 1989: 176)

Whilst Martin predictably invokes Vertov’s ‘camera eye’ in support of his schema, he finds this ‘romantic-imagistic tendency to be a strongly consistent one locally’, citing the experimental landscape films of the Cantrills, whose short film and performance pieces saw them celebrated as ‘artists of modernity’ (Dzenis 1998: 24), and the lesser known ‘trance cinema’ films by James Clayden (e.g. his *Antarctica* films and the eerily experimental *Corpse* [1982]).

At the same time, Graeme Turner noted the European modernist influence on one of the region’s most famous 1970s films, Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975):

It must be admitted that it was a film which convincingly mastered the tasteful, aesthetic look of the European modernist films of the preceding ten years. There was nothing provincial about *Picnic*’s rendition of Metropolitan visual style, and if it looks dated today it’s because international fashions have moved on. The most important achievement of these early films was the successful proposition of the artistic credentials of the Australian industry, and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is probably the film which most conclusively legitimised such claims.

(Turner 1989: 104)

The perceived absence of provinciality in *Picnic*, a film that explores the disappearance of private schoolgirls into the outback at the turn of the century, is telling. Speaking to the European avant-garde and ‘American movies of the classical period as something like the first global vernacular’ (Hansen 1999: 68), such films in the modernist ‘tradition’ are testament to ‘the diversity of ways in which this cinema was translated and reconfigured in both local and translocal contexts of reception’ (67). As Christopher Allen observes, ‘modernism tended to arrive in Australia as style (in the narrow sense) without content [...] it was essentially the sign of something else: youth, smartness, and wealth’ (1997: 98). This dialect of modernism/modernity revealed different experiences of technology, history, space, and power across the region.



Figure 26.1 *Picnic at Hanging Rock*: Anne-Louise Lambert (Miranda) lying on grass, with Karen Robson (Irma, right) and Jane Vallis (Marion) sitting behind her. © Peter Weir. Image courtesy of National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.

TECHNOLOGICAL STORY

The vernacular experience of the medium itself thus becomes ‘part of the historical formation of modernity’ in specific geographical and historical circumstances. Whilst the modernist *moment* and its continuing impact is notable in films of the post-1970s boom periods, the experience of cinema as emblematic of modernity speaks more generally to the development of film production, distribution, and spectatorship across the region.

André Bazin’s (1967) ‘myth of the total cinema’, to which the ‘progress’ narratives of modernism and modernity have been attached, is enlivened and challenged by cinema’s growing influence across the region. The modernist interest in new forms informs Australasian cinema history as ‘a series of firsts’ and ‘technological

determinism’, where ‘new technologies are discovered by an essentially internal process of research and development which then sets the conditions for social change and progress’ (Raymond Williams qtd. in Petrie 2000: 13). With Charles Tait’s *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), Australia is said to have produced the first ever full-length narrative feature film (and the qualification of running-time and narrative is central to this claim).

As early as 1895, Alfred Whitehouse (New Zealand’s earliest filmmaker) used Edison’s Kinetoscope to exhibit films in New Zealand (Moran and Vieth 2005: 79). The early and modern/modernist periods were marked in New Zealand by developing buildings, censorship laws and government interventions, increasing visibility and involvement with Australian film, travel films, narrative, and short features dealing with Maori dramas and love stories (*Hinemoa* by George Tarr [1914] is arguably the first New Zealand feature), ethnographic films, adaptations of novels and local stories (*The Romance of Sleepy Hollow* [1923]), comedies, racing films, documentaries, theatre chains (such as Amalgamated Theatres), and news reels. The National Film Unit was established in 1941, though only three feature films were made from 1940–70, all by John O’Shea (Moran and Vieth 2005: 280–2). Australia and New Zealand came to the cinema early on, even if other parts of the Pacific arrived somewhat later, subject as they were to different experiences of the modern/colonial socio-political context.

The modernist moment was defined by technological novelty, and the contexts of modernity were connected to developing urban centres; cinematic expressions of both appear most noticeably in New Zealand and Australia, primarily in Sydney:

Sydney defined cosmopolitanism and modernity in the national imagination, and central to this image was the cinema: its technology, its architecture, its stars, its marketing and, most of all, the stories it circulated to its audiences about Australia and the world. Going to the cinema embodied the bright lights, the romance and, for some, the vulgarities of city life. The presence of a film culture in Sydney dates back almost as far as the invention of modern cinema itself.

(Blaint and Dolgoplov 2008: 33–4)

In 1896, Australians first watched a public screening of people alighting the ferry at Manly. Soon after ‘the establishment of programs dominated by a “feature” film shifted the place of cinema in the urban cultural landscape, cementing “the pictures” in the daily lives of Sydneysiders’ (33–4). Domestic products or markets account for only part of this, as the growing American system secured its dominance of film in Australia.

The modern experience was about American films and new technology, but it was equally about immediate social spaces and centres. Although cinema created the modern architecture of ‘picture palaces’ in urban and suburban centres, and although the fortunes of both the Australian and New Zealand industries were susceptible to American products, local cities featured regularly in domestically produced films: as sites of new technology, changing social practices, and representations of evolving national mythologies. Although cinematic tropes of collective identity congregated around the landscape, Sydney remained central to images of city life and the modern world, particularly during periods of historical

modernism in Europe: witness Longford's *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) and Barrett's *The Breaking of the Drought* (1921) and Commonwealth 'propaganda' films such as Bert Ives' *This is Australia* (1932) and Frank Hurley's *A Nation is Built* (1937) (Blaint and Dolgoplov 2008: 35–6).

DISCURSIVE STORY

American classical cinema's global domination means that, 'in Australia and New Zealand, along with smaller island states, the principal industry of cinema is not production, but the business of circulating films to exhibitors and providing the means for films to be shown' (Landman and Ballard 2010: 7). For Australasia, understanding modernity's fragmented developments and their attendant modernist idiom cannot come entirely by focusing on technological history and metropolitan centralization. The limits of idealist technological histories lie 'in their inability to account for why the cinema developed at the times, in the places, and in the forms it did; and why [...] narrative feature film had emerged as the dominant form of filmmaking practice' (Petrie 2000: 13). The scholarly response often turns to

delineating alternative forms of modernism, both in the West and in other parts of the world, that vary according to their social and geopolitical locations, often configured along the axis of post/coloniality, and according to the specific subcultural and indigenous traditions.

(Hansen 1999: 60)

Such an observation allows study of the modernist/modernity axis in Australasian cinema to be understood discursively; cinema is directly related to colonialism and empire as extensions of modern/modernist influence.

The discourse of modernism as the expression of 'style', 'smartness', and 'wealth' for Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations explicitly articulates colonial power relations, economic imperialism, and changing regional relationships. This discursive production, as a vernacular modernism, 'played a key role in mediating competing cultural discourses on modernity and modernization, because it articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience' (Hansen 1999: 68).

The colonial/modern framing of the Pacific has disconnected smaller nations from cinema production, distribution, and scholarly histories. Foregrounding the 'slow and uneven' expansion of exhibition in the Pacific (showings in the Cook Islands and New Guinea in the 1920s, but nothing in the nearby Solomon Islands until the 1950s), Landman and Ballard point to a larger 'critical neglect' of the history of cinema in the Pacific, especially smaller island nations (Landman and Ballard 2010: 7). Unearthing stories of cinematic modernism in the region requires rigorous attention to 'the institutional practices and technologies of colonial cinema', the 'social practices of cinema-going in sites of significant cultural disjuncture', and the "'Pacific Orientalism" of American entertainment cinema' (Landman and Ballard 2010: 6). Such an enquiry's absence is partially filled by 1920s censorship and policy records in Australasia where 'Commonwealth loyalties' and the 'vulnerabilities of "native peoples" in respect to the cinema were a particular concern' (Landman and Ballard 2010: 8). In addition to American cinema, and the ethnographic and

(Australian) governmental films made and distributed in the Pacific prior to commercial exhibition, modernism was either present in censorship or organizational rhetoric, or in representations of Pacific Islanders in films such as Charles Chauvel's *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933), which featured Polynesian dancers, bare breasts, and floggings.

In New Zealand, Maori are consistently present in early film; it was not so much the absence of Maori from early film as it was the familiar omissions from historical narratives dealing with New Zealand cinema:

Gaston Melies produced three films of Maori stories in 1913 [...] overseas filmmakers made films about the Maori to satisfy an overseas demand for depictions of 'exotic' cultures [...] many filmmakers have interrogated the juxtaposition of tectonic plates of cultures, with the consequent grinding, crushing and reforming. Rudall Hayward's *The Te Kooti Trail* (1927) is based on a true story of the warrior Te Kooti against spreading European settlements. Set in the same era, the 1860s, but released in 1940, Hayward's *Rewi's Last Stand* is a narrative of intercultural love [...] indicative of the sometimes begrudging respect between these cultures that such love was understood to be both real and not taboo.

(Moran and Vieth 2005: 316–17)

This prominence has been elided in some public retellings of cinema's development in New Zealand. The story of Australian film has followed a 'boom and bust' model (with stop/start stories ever since, punctuated by successful individual films, or 'local Hollywoods'); the story of New Zealand modernist cinema is decidedly obscure. Sam Neill called it a 'cinema of unease' in the eponymous 1995 documentary; Horrocks sees this framing as Neill's sense that filmmakers have finally taken 'revenge on the parochial and repressive aspects of New Zealand society', in filmmaking that is 'still haunted by a "darker heart" of a "menacing land"' (Horrocks 1999: 129).

Neill's 'creaky thesis' has been broadly dismissed for its omission of 'urban films' and 'films made here by women (or by) Maori' (Martin qtd. in Horrocks 1999: 130). Neill's *Cinema of Unease* constructs a notion of violent and dark national insecurities that subsume larger developments prior to 1940 (and after 1985). The Maori focus of early/modernist cinema and the continuing theme of Maori – 'Pakeha' (non-Maori New Zealander) relations differentiates the local experiences of filmic modernism and modernity in their productive and reductive manifestations.

The historical modernism-cinema relationship in the Australasian region is not limited to commercial domination, artistic mimicry, and changing technologies, but includes a regional politics that exerts Australian power over smaller island nations and solidifies Australia and other nations' status as British imperial outposts. Referring to Australian films from 1919–39, Routt argues that metaphorical aspects of family relationships police 'populist' Australian characteristics (1989), using key elements of O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* to mark the changing nature of colonial experience. He argues:

there is a case for saying that Australian films of the twenties and thirties made a special feature of father–daughter relations, that the emphasis on or the interest

in that relation marks Australian films as different from others and that the continued foregrounding of that relation constitutes an invitation to interpret it.
(Routt 1989: 35)

The father–daughter theme, for example, suggests that ‘the colonialist begins as a split identity; two sexes, two generations, even two classes co-exist in a symbiotic relation which itself is riddled with paradox and doubling’ (Routt 1989: 39). Moving through modernist–colonial problematics of class, race and genetics, the ‘Prospero-complex’ in its Australian guise foregrounds empire as a cinematic ‘device to resolve or avoid the kind of Oedipal conflict which primes rebellions and wars of independence. But, as we know all too well, the device did not work’ (45). Cinema represents a modernity necessarily inflected with ‘civilization’s’ expansion, and concerned more with policing class and race than with the artistic traditions and avant-garde styles of later Australian and New Zealand cinema.

Modernism, as an artistic movement in Australasian cinema, differs significantly from modernism in other parts of the world; nor was it a direct counterpart for European and Russian styles. Khoo, Smaill, and Yue offer a neat summary of William Routt’s (2000) ‘ways in which modernism was expressed’ in Australian films of the 1920s: melodramatic narrative formalism; references to the modern world outside the film; ‘documentary realism’; and ‘deliberately “cinematic” sequences’ (Khoo *et al.* 2013: 26). Routt (2000) notes that modernism ‘could find little overt place in the popular entertainment of the period’, precisely because of its ‘aesthetic’ and ‘intellectual’ aspects (n.p.).

Khoo, Smaill, and Yue argue that the treatment of non-white characters in 1920s films ‘contributed to an important aspect of Australia’s cinematic “modernism”’ (Khoo *et al.* 2013: 26). I have argued that the invisibility, oppression, and appropriation of Aboriginal stories and Aboriginality in Australian cinema especially (2000; 2005), have served colonial understandings of space, race, and identity from the early to mid-twentieth century. In Barrett’s *A Girl of the Bush* (1921), a small baby has been attacked by savage Aborigines, while in Phil K. Walsh’s *The Birth of White Australia* (1928), docile Indigenous folk welcome white power.

The explicit mechanics of counter-discursive cinema after the Second World War and at the most recent turn of the century exceed the bounds of this paper. Superficially, though, we can identify the visual experimentation and reconstruction that so vibrantly engage with modern/modernist colonialism.

One way of accessing the ongoing issues attached to colonialism and its aftermath is by attempting to understand the way metaphors of colonial power are deliberately undone in a range of Aboriginal-themed Australian films. This *anti-colonial* impulse in Australian cinema focuses on the key image of the white home, from *Jedda* (dir. Charles Chauvel, 1955) to the well-known short films *Terra Nullius* (dir. Anne Pratten, 1993) and *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (dir. Tracey Moffatt, 1990), as well as the full length features *Radiance* (dir. Rachel Perkins, 1998), and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (dir. Phillip Noyce, 2002). This noticeable pattern of revision, refusal, and change is shaped by the complexities of Aboriginal difference, counter-discursive cinematic narratives and mythologies as well as indigenous agency and action (Lambert 2005).

CONCLUSION

‘The range of Modernist possibilities in the cinema was clearly outlined by the end of the 1920s; and the disavowal of Modernist preoccupations was already proceeding apace’ (Wood 2011: 269). The myth of the ‘total cinema’ and idealist technological narratives extending from modernist thinking are troubled by the varied circumstances of film-making in, and representations of, the Pacific island nations within and beyond Australasia.

These observations speak to modernism as a series of material-semiotic artefacts produced by empire, colony, race, and religion as they shaped early twentieth century Australasian history and politics. To repeat the initial question then: what does Australasian cinematic modernism look like? Modernism and cinema are inseparable in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific, from developing technologies, expanding Australian regional power, and American cinema’s global dominance. Nonetheless, the aesthetic reference points, and the Russian and European early to mid-century avant-garde in particular, are answered less by the modernist styles found in later years than by constructions of politicized images – both dominant and counter-discursive.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IMPORTED AND HOMEGROWN

Dancing modernists in Oceania



Amanda Card

In Oceania, as in most locations, those corralled under a modernist banner make interesting, often odd companions: intellectually rigorous partisans, avant-garde cosmopolitans, politically aware doctrinaires, with the occasional appropriator thrown into the mix. There are ballet dancers, Central European moderns, expressive dancers influenced by physical culture, and creators of what came to be called dance-drama. Some had direct links to experimenters in Europe and the United States; others gleaned their practices secondhand or simply made it up as they went along. Although far from the historical progenitors of modernism in the arts, Oceanic-based artists were concerned with the same contemporary aesthetics and political struggles as their mentors and colleagues across the globe. They were interested in experimenting with form and content by paring back a reliance on established techniques. They believed in the autonomy of dance, but also expanded their form by borrowing ideas and technical practices from other art forms. They combined a radical politics with innovative aesthetics, and appropriated from other cultures in their search for originality, universality, and a cosmopolitan but locally particular identity and practice.

Oceania includes many island nations: Australia and New Zealand (Australasia); New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Fiji (Melanesia); Tonga, Samoa, the Cook and Easter Islands (Polynesia), as well as Kiribati, and the Caroline, Mariana and Marshall Islands (Micronesia). Considering the histories of these islands, with their common experiences of colonization, it is not surprising that dance modernism was an imported practice. As settler societies with a history of invasion and colonization, the two largest islands in the region, Australia and New Zealand, were outposts of the British Empire in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans. Though part of the Oceanic region, these nations had a more direct association with European artistic trends. Although both were indebted to British judicial, governmental, and military associations, by the 1920s the United States had begun to influence the life choices and desires of the Australasian populace. In the wake of the Second World War, American influence arguably outweighed, or at least offered stiff competition to, British influences on life and culture. Separated by the Tasman Sea, these island nations have similar dance genealogies. Marianne Schultz's claim that

New Zealand modern dancers ‘sit comfortably within a global community [...] while, at the same time, reflecting domestic cultural and political developments’ (2011: 225) is equally true of Australians. With this history, we inevitably find a steady development of modernism in dance in Australasia.

Migration played a key role in the development of Australasian modernisms. The aftermath of the First World War, the rise of fascism in Europe, and the threat and reality of the Second World War left the fearful, persecuted, and stateless looking for a new home: a refuge, an escape, a new start. As Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara and Philip Goad suggest, these events brought ‘cosmopolitan figures’ across to the other side of the world (2006: 9–10). Such immigrants helped consolidate the local understanding of, and interest in, modernism in architecture and design, as well as the visual arts. In a similar manner, German, Latvian, Viennese, British, Dutch, Czechoslovakian, and American dancers arrived in Australasia from the 1920s to the 1950s, bringing with them the latest trends in choreographic experimentation, teaching and performance practice.

Locally born artists also sought inspiration through travel. These women – and they were mostly women – travelled to Europe and America, bringing German expressionism (*Ausdruckstanz*) and physical culture back to the region: forms influenced by artists and pedagogues such as François Delsarte, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf Laban, Kurt Joss, and Mary Wigman. Some even introduced local audiences to movement ideas from Asia, and the Pacific, and discovered the indigenous cultures of the region, developing a kind of Oceanic Orientalism that often had more to do with inspired imaginings than direct experience. Others brought American modern dance through their exposure to the work of Ted Shawn, Louis Horst, Doris Humphries, Charles Weidman, and Martha Graham. These returning dancers – Joan Henry, Irene Vera Young, Heather Gell, Joan Pope, Margo Thomas, Rona Stephenson, Coralie Hinkley among them, and their visiting or migrating counterparts Lola Laban, Sonia Revid, Elisabet Wiener, Lucie Mendl Stonnell, Gisa Taglich, Gertrud Bodenwieser, Margaret Barr, and Ruth Bergner – fashioned their studio practices, choreographic processes, and collaborations around a contemporary search for truth, concerned as they were with authenticity, relevance and efficacy. Many of them, like their counterparts in Europe and the United States, wanted to change the world, or at least to reflect the change happening in the world and offer alternative visions. They all saw dance as a valid medium through which to enact, inspire, and illustrate the nature and shape of social and artistic change.

Although the story of dance modernism in Australasia hails most unproblematically from expressive European or American modern dance influences, one of the most well-received forms of dance modernism arrived in Australia and New Zealand through a far more mainstream practice – classical ballet; in particular, the work of the Ballets Russes. Although the region did not have a direct encounter with Serge Diaghilev’s original Ballets Russes, the companies formed after Diaghilev’s death in 1929, under the direction of Colonel Wassily de Basil, visited three times between 1936 and 1940, under various names: Colonel W. de Basil’s Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, Covent Garden Russian Ballet, and the Original Ballet Russes. De Basil’s tastes may have favoured the ‘middlebrow’ (Garafola 2011: 71), but as Lee Christofis explains, his tours exposed Australasian audiences to two distinct choreographic traditions. The first included the established, the conventional, and newly acceptable

Russian Imperial Theatre offerings (story ballets created by Marius Petipa in the late nineteenth century) and the early twentieth-century innovations of Michel Fokine (2011: 26). The second were more experimental works, created under the auspices of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and de Basil's company: what Christofis has called a 'more exotic array of modern one-act ballets' (26). The former classics kept audiences happy, the latter modern ballets 'unsettled staid or less-informed ballet-goers, while at the same time captivating local dancers and members of Australia's cultural cognoscenti' (29). Massine's 'symphonic' ballets had a major impact, with Australasian audiences being offered *Les Présages* and *Choreartium*, both premiering in 1933, across the three tours. With their lack of narrative, minimalist décor, and choreographic use of abstraction, asymmetry, and counterpoint, these ballets introduced Australian audiences to the outcome of modernist principles that had fuelled a dance revolution in Europe in earlier decades.

But Christofis singles out for special mention the choreography of company dancers, commending them for responding to a contemporary modernist aesthetic. These works were created for the last touring de Basil company in 1939/40 and included a reworking of the 1935 *Icare* by the maturing Serge Lifar, with new décor by the then radical, but hardly famous, 23-year-old Australian artist Sydney Nolan. *Icare* (1939) was marked out for its 'extreme simplicity' and 'austere elegance', and inspired one Sydney critic to proclaim: 'If it had any meaning, it was not apparent to the casually seeking eye' (qtd. in Christofis 2011: 33). Igor Schwezov also offered *Lutte éternelle* (*The Eternal Struggle*) that season – a work that the American critic Walter Terry later commended for its 'effective fusions of the brilliance of ballet with the potency of the modern dance' (qtd. in Walker 1982: 103). One of the few women given a chance to try her hand at choreography was a Massine favourite, dancer Nina Verchinina. Her piece, *Etude Choreographic* (1939), also fused Central European modern dance (a form Verchinina had studied with Rudolf Laban in Germany) and classical technique (derived from her tutelage in Paris with Diaghilev dancer-choreographers Olga Preobrajenska and Bronislava Nijinska). Created to music by Bach, with choreography in the tradition of Massine's celebrated 'symphonic' ballets, *Etude Choreographic* was intended to be a 'realisation of musical architecture through kinaesthetic dance form' and was considered 'severely intellectual' (Montana 2011: 24).

Although the various de Basil companies offered Australasian audiences access to the principles of a Ballet Russes modernism, an alternate approach derived from Central European dance or *Ausdruckstanz* had already been followed in the region for over a decade. Two Melbourne-based dancers, Joan Henry and Joan Joske, were early devotees of Lola Laban, cousin of Rudolf Laban and pupil of Mary Wigman, whose dance ideas she brought to Australia in the early 1920s. In 1927, Henry opened her own studio: The Studio of Absolute Dance. One Melbourne newspaper asked the obvious question: 'What is Absolute Dance?' Channelling Wigman, Henry replied:

It is a living and moving art creation interpreted by the living body as its instrument. [It] shapes itself out of its own essence, independently of its own interpretation, which may be understood either in the abstract or literary sense by the spectator who shares nearly all the experiences of the dancer.¹

Henry and Joske also enjoyed the (dubious) honour of being among the first Australians to offer an Asiatic influence as their choreographic inspiration. Their Orientalist works such as *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (1933) or *Katisubata* (1934) – the latter borrowed Japanese theatrical conventions and narrative concerns – were inspired, not from immediate experience, but from travel and art books, prints, and paintings (Card 2008: 25–9).

The next group of artists to ignite an interest in Central European dance modernisms were those fleeing the rise of fascism, its consequences for Jewish artists, and the impending war in Europe through the late 1920s and the 1930s. Latvian émigré Sonia Revid was among them. Revid, who had been a pupil of Wigman, migrated to Melbourne, Australia, in 1932. She caused a stir, entertaining and perplexing contemporary observers in equal measure. But, by 1935, as the tabloid newspaper *The Star* confirmed, Revid's 'very individual ideas about the dance' were received with 'considerable interest by members of artistic, musical and dramatic circles in Melbourne' (5 September 1935: 23). *The Truth*, a tabloid with leanings to the political left, was another odd but appreciative champion of her art, an anonymous writer stating: 'there are among us a sprinkling of enlightened souls who realise the beauty of this new form of self-expression' (30 November 1935).²

Revid was a consummate modernist. She believed in the self-sufficiency of movement as a mode of practice; dance had no need to rely on any other art for confirmation of its worth. She also sought the revelation of unmediated experience, where motion would reveal deep-rooted, elemental emotions. Like her mentor Mary Wigman, Revid rejected classical formalism but replaced it with another essentializing search for truth: a universal, embodied truth, a form that could not only communicate an individual's artistry to an audience, but expose essential truths with which the non-dancer would empathize. This complicated dialogue between individual expression and the need to reflect and satisfy a collective sensibility was an intrinsic part of Revid's creative process and indicative of her modernist impulse. Each dancer must establish herself as an innovator rather than mere translator of someone else's mode and process of expression. As she stated in her unpublished manuscript *Some Thoughts on Art Dance and Art in General*, 'every great artistic personality creates her own style, has her own message to give, and adds to the growth of art' (1936: 7). But, she also thought dance had to communicate universal truths to have relevance in a contemporary age.³

Other local dancers such as Irene Vera Young, returning from New York in 1928, brought the influence of *Ausdruckstanz* and its association with physical culture to Sydney. Young encountered what she called 'German Dance' through the late 1920s, under the tutelage of Sarah Mildred Strauss and Hans Wiener (Jan Veen) in New York. Wiener and Straus had been trained by devotees of the physical culturist Bess Mensendieck, the Viennese Ellinor Tordis, as well as Laban and Wigman. One of Irene Vera Young's keen interests was the motion choir, *Burgegungschor*, popularized by Laban. As Susan Manning explains, *Bergegungschor* offered access to performance for a growing number of amateur dancers enrolled in classes at Laban's various schools across Europe. They would appear in mass movement displays of anything from 50 to 200 participants (1993: 132–33). Young's 'choirs' were nowhere near as large in Sydney, but with the help of Ilma Barnes's 'verse choirs', they provided Young, as they did Laban and Wigman, with a backdrop for her own performances

and those of her semi-professional contingent of dancers which grew up around her (and included her daughter Barbara Young).

Similar pedagogical genealogies arrived in New Zealand in the late 1930s. Emigrating separately from Vienna in the late 1930s and 1940, Lucie Mendl Stonnell and Gisa Taglich brought the dance/physical cultural mix to New Plymouth and Wellington, cities on Te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island) of New Zealand (Schultz 2011: 228). But probably the most famous exponent of expressive dance to arrive in Australasia was the Viennese-born Gertrud Bodenwieser, another Jewish émigré who left Austria in 1938 after German occupation and toured South America and New Zealand before settling in Australia, where her company of dancers joined her in 1939. Beginning her choreographic career in Vienna, Bodenwieser's movement and thematic concerns reflected subjects favoured by other modernist dance practitioners at the time: the individual's struggle in the face of institutional and societal exploitation, coercion, and mediocrity. Bodenwieser's themes were often grand: 'the life of Man', or dance dramas examining the nature of evil, or 'humanity in conflict with itself' (Brissenden 2010: 209–12). Her most famous piece, part of a larger work, the four-part *Gewalten des Lebens* (1923), was known as *Dämon Maschine* (*The Demon Machine*). Showing 'the power of abstraction to undermine narrative unity', *Demon Machine* was a staple of Bodenwieser's repertoire for over 25 years (Toepfer 1997: 226). Although first performed in Vienna in 1924, *Demon Machine* was still being presented in Australasia in the 1950s. The women in Bodenwieser's company were known for their beauty, strength, and agility. In this work their powerful female bodies built a machine and they critiqued the potential of automation – a modernist aesthetic warning against the pitfalls of its very inspiration: modernity.

Many Australasian modernists followed Bodenwieser's lead and made dance works that offered a political and social critique of local and world affairs. These artists were often left-leaning, closet or declared socialists, or fellow travellers and card-carrying members of the communist party. In New Zealand the work of the Wellington-based New Dance Group was a case in point. Formed in 1945, two months after the surrender of Japan and the end of the Second World War in the Pacific, the Group's founding members assembled in the French Maid Coffee Bar, a 'welcome meeting place for European refugees who came to New Zealand after the war' (Schultz 2008: 34). Key artists within the group – Rona Bailey, Philip Smithells, Olive Smithells, and Edith Sipos – discussed 'class struggle, anti-Fascism and the effects of Nazism' (Schultz 2008: 34). They also admired American culture, the principles of which had been brought to the Pacific South West in earnest with the arrival of American troops between 1942 and 1945; their culture was 'so different from the British culture with which most *Pakeha* New Zealanders identified' (34).⁴ Before forming the New Dance Group in Wellington, Rona Bailey (née Stephenson) had spent time at the University of California (1937) and then transferred to study dance as part of her physical education degree at New York's Columbia University in 1938. While there, she attended political rallies, plays by the Group Theatre and the Living Newspaper, and groundbreaking dance works by Graham and Humphrey in their seasons across 1938 and 1939 (37–8). Bailey then returned to New Zealand, teamed up with Philip Smithells, and formed the New Dance Group – modelled in name and intent on the New York-based New Dance Group formed in 1932 (35). This group, like many radicalized dance artists in Australasia, struggled to maintain members and develop a

wide audience, but, as Schultz suggests, they did manage to ‘introduce radical ideas about dance, art, music and physical education to New Zealand’ (2011: 232). Works by the Wellington New Dance Group – various short pieces collected under the title of *Themes for an Unfinished Major Work* (1945) and *Hiroshima* (1947) recalled the concerns of Margaret Barr, another artist who had settled in New Zealand in the 1940s, then migrated to Australia in 1950.



Figure 27.1 Gertrud Bodenwieser. MS 9263 Papers of Gertrud Bodenwieser, 1919–97 [manuscript]. Series 2: Photographs and slides, 1938–79 Piece 13. Selectively digitized Benda, D’Ora. Poses from *The Demon Machine* [picture]. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Figure 27.2 Olive Smithells in the New Dance Group work *Hiroshima*.
Photographer: Brian Brake. Courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.
Registration number C.025147.

Barr was British, brought up in Bombay and California, where she started her dance training, before moving to New York and Martha Graham's studio where she created her first work *Hebridean* in 1928. She then moved to London and was later employed at Dartington Hall – the radical, experimental school run by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst in Devon, England. As Garry Lester suggests, at Dartington:

Margaret embraced the challenges of experimentation in performance by using voice and song and body percussion alongside extended passages of dance to create the desired effects within her work. She also began to develop her lifelong interest in lighting and set design, two considerations that became integral in the genesis of each new work [...].

(2007: 53)

In the late 1930s, Barr returned to teach in London, migrated to New Zealand, and settled in Auckland. She arrived in Sydney in 1950 and established her company, the Sydney Dance-Drama Group, in 1952. Ten years later, one Sydney critic called Barr a 'unique genius' and 'the most fertile choreographer this country possesses' (qtd. in Card 2001: 68). In the two decades that followed the Second World War, Barr's modernism – her experimentation with form, her use of other artistic forms of expression, the political nature of her subject matter, her rejection of established techniques, her use of improvisation, and search for original, but universally applicable, locally derived practice and content – was indicative of the period.⁵

The final area ventured into by modern dancers in Australasia in the 1950s, which will be briefly canvassed in this chapter, is the search for the locally particular in motion and content. Margaret Barr offered her share of locally inspired dances throughout her career, Bodenwieser produced a few as well, and even Revid created *Bushfire Drama* in 1939, but these artists' movement languages predominantly derived from their American and European educations. One of the most intriguing dance makers of the period, who scoured the palate of Oceania for inspiration with the intent of producing something regionally particular, was Beth Dean, an American who made Australia her home in the 1950s. Dean's most famous contribution, which could shelter under a widely inclusive banner of modernism in dance, was *Corroboree*, produced for the visit of the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II in 1954. Using a score of the same name by John Antill, which had its first performance in 1946, Dean's version was created after another choreographer, Rex Reid, offered his own in 1951. Both works took inspiration from Australian Aboriginal dance and story, and the photographs and ethnographies of Charles Percy Mountford. In her early career Dean also created performances inspired by the Maori dances of New Zealand, which she claimed she learnt from 'the influential Maori leader Princess Te Puea Herangi' (Haskins 2011: 26). Beginning in the 1960s, Dean and her husband Victor Carell re-produced and promoted the dances of other Oceanic regions. This relationship with indigenous, local practices has, with the passage of time, acquired the taint of appropriation. This taint has plagued the history of non-indigenous, avant-garde artists in colonized, settler, and post-colonial societies across the globe as modernists attempted to make their work internationally relevant but locally particular (Card 2001: 71–9).

As Stephen, McNamara, and Goad explain, part of the problem faced by modernists across the arts in Australasia/Oceania from the 1920s to the 1960s was how to create individually innovative, internationally recognized (and recognizable) products that were also nationally particular (2006: 14–17). This desire was sometimes self-imposed, but it was often visited on artists by taste-makers, managers of arts institutions, and governments. In much writing on, or about, modernism, there has also been ‘a common desire to propound an explanation of the unique course and development of [local] art and culture’ (Stephen, McNamara and Goad 2006: 19). But, as this story of dance modernism in the region suggests, the best we can hope for is an impenitent collection of modernists – some defined by attempts to enact purification in form, some collecting together through their dialogue with other practices, and a few appropriating from the traditions they found in their new homes, all swimming upstream as information and people poured in from other places to settle and grow in a new location. This history has produced an eclectic bunch of artists, some of whom are highlighted here, who could be called the dance modernists of Oceania.

NOTES

1. Henry, J. ‘Challenge to Ballet, Melbourne sees a new art’, unidentified newspaper article, folder 10, box 9, *Keith Glennon Papers*, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, Australia.
2. Both these articles are available in ‘Photographs, scrapbook, and certificates of Sonia Revid’, 1902–67, MS 8301, manuscripts collection, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.
3. Sonia Revid’s unpublished manuscript is available in the papers of published P.R. Stephenson, MLMSS 1284/box 107, manuscripts collection, Mitchell Library collection, State Library of NSW, Sydney, Australia. For more on Revid see Card (1999).
4. *Pakeha* is Maori for New Zealanders of European decent.
5. There are other artists also worthy of mention. Ruth Berger immigrated to Australia in 1939. She trained with Sonia Revid and attended Elisabet Wiener’s Modern Dance Studio in Melbourne. Elisabet Wiener trained with Elisabeth Duncan (related to Isadora Duncan) and Berthe Trümphy, who had herself been trained by Laban and Wigman (Brissenden 2010: 191–2).

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DEFINING NATIONS

Modernist literature in Australia and
the Pacific Islands

—♦—
Matthew Hall

European modernism's origins correlate to the founding of the commonwealth of Australia, a time when the national consciousness was being defined in relation to colonial origins. The will to nation and hunger for identity played out in the political, social, psychological, and mythic enterprise of defining the narrative of a young country. Australia's colonialist history imposed a 'precise and exclusive alignment of unitary ethnic, national territory and literary traditions' on the country's historicizing nationalisms (Mead 2009: 549). Colonialism established a need to demarcate between winners and losers, colonized and colonizer, and drew on European heroic models of conquest which have permeated the discourse of Australian literature and nationhood. The need to perpetuate a unified nationhood fed into a narrative of Australia which was symbolically, historically, and culturally exclusive and in which Australian literature operates within 'its own terms of displacement' (Kinsella 2009: 473).

The displacement and devaluation of Australian Indigenous people and their mythopoeia assured that post-settlement literature was at best an extension of British-Irish antecedents, and colluded in the mono-historicizing nationhood of colonial literature. While the two world wars saw some influx of transnational ideas, Australia's isolation can also be attributed to a tacit anxiety held by settlers over the dispossession of Indigenous people. Due to this anxiety and isolation, the literatures of Australian patriotism and nation-founding do not fit easily within the grand narrative of European modernism, and, one is tempted to argue, speak to the problematized relation to literature internationally. The story of Australian literature finds foundations in the heroic narratives of nation-making, the representation of human dominance over nature, as social imaginings set to skew the reality of penal settlement, dispossession, and colonization. The incipient modernism of early twentieth-century Australian literature is strongly correlative with the creation and legitimization of a hegemonic national identity.

The primacy of the Australian landscape has always been at the core of the Australian literary identity, yet the definition of a nation which was 'built off the sheep's back' is as much an urban construct as a regional one. The Australian 'bush' or rural identity, bush-balladry, and the heroic traditions upon which they rest, speak to rhetorical propaganda of nation-making through which colonial literature

began. The social imaginings and cultural expressions of a national identity drawn on the division between the city and the bush were in conflict in *The Bulletin* as early as 1892, with the publication of both A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson. Paterson's stories explore the potential of a new colonial arcadia, most notably in 'The Man from Snowy River' (which remains central to Australia's mythic bush identity). For Lawson, the bush represented isolation, hardship, and physical toil. The debate between Paterson and Lawson in *The Bulletin* displayed an engagement with the landscape, which underpinned the class and temperament of both poets, with Lawson describing the outback as a wasteland and Paterson with a bucolic, post-Romantic vision. Judith Wright would later describe this opposition as the Australian landscape's 'double aspect', in which Lawson's outback hell had to be controlled, dominated, and subdued, and in which Paterson saw 'the reality of newness and freedom' (Wright 1965: xi). Lawson was heavily critical of Paterson's vision and understood the force of progress which modernity implied, writing with some lament, 'The mighty bush with iron rails/Is tethered to the world' ('The Roaring Days').

The Bulletin's presentation of oppositional aspects of early colonial life and the divisions between the bush and the city in Australian literature is a commonplace, if anachronistic, dualism. The divide between the reality and the myth of Australian landscape would continue to be played out in the realism of Murray Bail's 'The Drover's Wife' (*Contemporary Portraits*, 1975) and Frank Moorehouse's *Forty-Seventeen* (1988), and later in the debates between Les Murray and Peter Porter over the origins of Australian literary traditions as belonging to Athenian (urban) or Boeotian (rural) literary traditions.

Under the literary editorship of A.G. Stephens from 1894–1906, *The Bulletin* moved from late-romantic lyrical representations of Australian life to the early modernism of Christopher Brennan, who corresponded with Stéphane Mallarmé and brought the influence of international modernism to his work. Among other contributors were Bernard O'Dowd (who briefly corresponded with Whitman), Arthur Adams, David Wright, Mary Gilmore, and Louisa Lawson.

The first generation of Australian modernists to emerge during the First World War period were Leon Gellert, Zora Cross, Lesbia Harford, Mary Fullerton, and C.J. Dennis. Despite the tendency of critics to 'dismiss women's poetry as frivolous or light', the female authors of the First World War have risen to the most sustained interest (Vickery 2007: 12). Lesbia Harford infused high modernist sensibility with colloquial lyrics, aligning her with Lawson's radicalism. Harford's minimal, sensual, and often homoerotic verse expressed a personal politics aligned with her socialism; her focus on migrant and female labourers laid a path for Mary Gilmore's later work. Mary Fullerton published two coquettish collections under the pseudonym 'E', which show the influence of Emily Dickinson. Zora Cross drew criticism for the expression of sexuality in her *Songs of Love and Life* (1917). C.J. Dennis's *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915) drew upon the ballad tradition in the tales of a roughneck larrikin's domestication and reformation during his marriage. Dennis's bestseller mixed nostalgic nationalism with comic self-imaging of the urban (Kirkpatrick 2009: 213).

The Sydney-based journal *Vision* (1923–4) was a little magazine that characterised Australia's early-modernist avant-garde. *Vision's* editor, Kenneth Slessor, capitalized on the writings of Jack Lindsay in establishing an avant-garde journal which strove

against the ‘short-sighted nationalism’ of *The Bulletin*, which, as Lindsay wrote, ‘can only be proud of verse about shearers and horses and measures the reality of its work by its local references’ (Lindsay 1923: 34). Slessor, a modernist of the Poundian type, fomented in the journal a critical reaction to the spiritual malaise left by the First World War. Fleeing the fantasy of *The Bulletin*’s new arcadia and facing the reality of its wounded diggers, Slessor strove for something more primitive through which to define the Australian identity.

By the late 1920s a series of anthropological and ethnographic publications on Indigenous culture began to appear. These included James Devaney’s *The Vanished Tribes* (1929) and David Unaipon’s *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals* (which was published without attribution in 1930), and had Australian authors turning inward for a sense of identity. The first writer to broach these subjects was Mary Gilmore, whose collections *The Wild Swan* (1930) and *Under the Wings* (1932) began to include Australian Indigenous subjects and material. Maintaining a link with *The Bulletin* group’s nationalisms, Rex Ingamells published the essay ‘Conditional Culture’ which sought to free Australian literature from outside influences and to examine it within the spectrum of Australia’s history and tradition, both modern and pre-colonial. Ingamells, W.F. Hudson, and Ian Mundie took ‘Conditional Culture’ as their manifesto, and founded the Jindyworobak group. Many of the poems that the Jindyworobak group published appropriated or, often, ventriloquized Aboriginality (the appropriation of sacred texts and the mock primitivism that comprised their works continues to foster suspicions of racism). The Jindyworobak group sought refuge in the primitive as a solution to the malaise of the war and Australia’s fledgling embrace of modernity. The inclusion of Indigenous dialect and the mimesis of Indigenous oral traditions, however poorly received, did work to break Australian modernism from the confines of the white male vernacular.

Originally a member of the Jindyworobak club, Max Harris went on to publicly castigate Ingamells’ poem ‘Moorawathimeering’ with a rhetorical flourish. Leveraging his position of influence as a journalist among the Melbourne and Sydney publishing elite, Harris fashioned himself an outspoken authority on Australian literature and began the journal *Angry Penguins* (1940–6). He propagated an identity as a surrealist, and set about ravishing the literary establishment. His outspoken and rambunctious nature led him to becoming something of an iconoclast figure in Australian modernism, and while there were those who saw him as leading Australia towards a new avant-garde, Harris’s conduct also fostered a good deal of antagonism. Set to publicly humiliate Harris over the divisive and fraught relations he drew between formalists and modernists, two conservative poets, James McAuley and Harold Stewart, plotted Harris’s downfall. Together McAuley and Stewart invented the fictitious and recently deceased garage mechanic turned poet, Ern Malley. Over the course of a day McAuley and Stewart fashioned an entire oeuvre through pastiche and mock surrealism, and had the collection, *The Darkening Ecliptic*, sent to Harris, claiming it to be a discovery of the poet’s next of kin, his sister, Ethel Malley. Harris was taken in on the hoax, and devoted a commemorative issue of *Angry Penguins* to Malley in 1944. Ranging from debauched surrealism to romantic melancholy, the publication of an unknown genius who died before his time raised the interest and ire of many readers. Shortly thereafter news of the hoax broke, bringing worldwide publicity to the case, and later bringing Harris, who had championed Malley as ‘one of the two giants of

contemporary Australian poetry' into the courtroom to face charges for the publication of indecent material (qtd. in Kirkpatrick 2009: 221).

The Malley affair brought to light the changing nature of Australian literature, highlighting the shift from public nation-making into an exclusive, culturally controlled commodity. In attempting to dupe Harris, *The Darkening Ecliptic* proved an ironic success, with the collection accepted as one of the ultimate triumphs of Australian modernism. The hoax and its aftermath ended in one of the most memorable folkloric tales in Australian literary memory, and while the story remains something of an outlier in Australian culture, Ern Malley was painted by myth-making Sidney Nolan, as well as Garry Shead, and inspired Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003).

The Malley affair set back the acceptance of Australian modernism, but eventually transnational exposure to European and American writing flooded over the patriarchal nation-making traditions of Australian literature. In the wake of this drive towards literary progress, younger poets drew Dorothy Hewett, Bruce Beaver, and David Campbell to adopt a more experimental stance, while poets such as A.D. Hope, Gwen Harwood, and McAuley would remain stalwart formalists. The full embrace of modernism encouraged a youthful wave of writers; this growth paired with the social fight for individual liberties drove the poetic activities of the 1960s, with a diversifying small press, public readings, and a burgeoning drug culture.

Poet Judith Wright's work went through a major shift at this time, as she began publicly to react to the pioneering impulses critics imposed on her work. Inspired by her friend Oodgeroo, Wright began a conscious process of reconceptualizing her work to present a broader scope of Australian settlement, exploring Indigenous land rights and colonial anxiety about the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people. This concluded in a redrafting of her 1959 collection *The Generations of Men* to include Indigenous perspectives and the expression of post-colonial anxiety in *The Cry for the Dead* (1981).

Finding inspiration in sources from increasingly experimental American poetics, political reaction to Vietnam conscription, and an increased antagonism towards the oppressive politics of the self, a group of poets eventually to fall under the banner 'Generation of '68' began an intrepid path towards a linguistically innovative poetics. Reacting against the canonization of formal poets such as Hope and McAuley, the Generation of '68 poets developed a polymorphous voice, extending and utilizing the diffusion of the lyric 'I' common in American poetry. The Generation of '68 included John Tranter, Gig Ryan, Robert Adamson, J.S. Harry, Jennifer Maiden, John Forbes, and John Scott. The late 1960s and 1970s were a flourishing time for Australian literature, with literary experimentation, the inclusion of political discourses, and a focus on the materiality of language characterizing the literature of the period. In Tranter's introduction to *The New Australian Poetry*, he argues that this generation of writers developed as 'an integral part of a wider struggle for freedom' (1979: xvii). Denying the 'quasi-religious rhetoric' of Australian formalism (1979: xvii), the Generation of '68 divided their work from the conservative writers championed by Grey and Lehman: Rosemary Dobson, Les Murray, and Kevin Hart. Dubbed the 'Era of Factionalism', the divide between literary aspirants was unprecedented at the time, but just as with the debate between Murray and Porter over the origins of Australian literature, the era of factionalism was, in retrospect, drastically overblown.

Later articulated in Mead and Tranter's *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*, this new generation of writers set out to challenge the established way of reading and writing Australian literature (Mead and Tranter 1991: xxvii). Tranter's work began a process of reconceptualizing Australian poetics as informed by and contesting American and European modernist traditions. Tranter's work has maintained its focus on the defamiliarization of the object, working to incorporate a critique of social politics and cultural fetishization (Kinsella 2009: 468). Robert Adamson's work drew upon his knowledge of Black Mountain Poetry, creating a personal and familial lyricism, an innovative cartography of the self mapped over the banks of the Hawkesbury River. Gig Ryan's sardonic urban reflections were set against the traditions of high culture, fusing myth (usually Greek) with gender politics and a sharp critique of capital. The counter-culture myth of Michael Dransfield's *Drug Poems* was accentuated by his untimely death, resulting in a folkloric iconicity and lasting influence. Dransfield's poetic drew on a self-created fantasy, fusing neo-Romanticism with a satirical vision of Australian modernism (Kinsella 2009: 497). John Forbes drew from Dransfield, contesting assumptions about Australian literary traditions with a scintillating urban wit, as in the poem 'Speed, A Pastoral'. Forbes wrote a hybrid poetic deeply informed by literary antecedents which were reimagined through a rebellious, political lens. From a poetry drawn on the lines of colonial expression, the Generation of '68 concentrated together individual writers in a loose affiliation of an increasingly pluralistic nationalist voice. Aware of the terms of its own displacement and drawn by an incipient social politics, the Generation of '68 did not aim towards a redefinition of nationhood, but towards a connectivity that incorporated feminism, migrant, Indigenous, and sub-cultural writing, a rising internationalism and a plurality of voices.

The increasing focus on social politics in Australian literature, reconceptualization of the materiality of language, and on the means of production, concentrated 1970s Australian literature on 'updating and extending the pre-existing historical and political terms of national settlement' (Mead 2009: 550). As with Judith Wright's attempt to overturn the mono-historicizing critical readings of her poems, and to focus on the expression of colonial anxiety, the 1970s Indigenous rights movement increased attention to Aboriginal writing. Kevin Gilbert's landmark anthology *Inside Black Australia* would eventually collate the poets at the centre of this renewed focus, publishing the work of Jack Davis and Oodgeroo (Kath Walker) and introducing new voices such as Charmaine Papertalk-Green and Lionel Fogarty, both innovative poets whose work denounced the linguistic centrality of colonial English and sought new ways to combine oral traditions with expressions of displacement and belonging. Continuing the tradition of literary hybridity, a younger generation of Indigenous poets including Samuel Watson, Tony Birch, and Lisa Bellar wrote against the spatial, temporal and ethnic identity of the national voice. Australia's loosening immigration policies eventually drew in writers of transnational origins such as Ouyang Yu, Ania Walwicz, Pi O, and John Mateer, whose writing creates intertexts between Australian literary traditions and the histories, geographies, and literary antecedents of their former nations. In the 1970s to 1980s the diversifying voice of Australian literature became defined by the slippages between the language of migrants and the language of nationhood.

During the final decades of Australian modernism the primacy of the landscape that dominated the nation-making ethos of *The Bulletin* was also critically and

creatively revised. John Kinsella's 'international regionalism', with its focus on an interactive, international communicative space which preserves regional and cultural integrity, is one of the aspects of critical introspection given to late-modern concepts of nation. Further developments involving transcultural comparisons and a re-reading of the local can be found in the decolonizing work of Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker, who worked to repatriate David Unaipon's Indigenous stories back to their original family groups. Also included in the reimagining of the country that typified late-modernism in Australia are the intertextual and ficto-critical work of Val Plumwood, Deborah Bird-Rose, and Tim Bonyhady who sought to investigate the nation from differing cultural and cross-cultural experiences, incorporating ecofeminist, ethnographic, oral historical, and cultural studies approaches to remaking the nation.

The current of modernism which drew Australian literary traditions from an exclusionary mono-historicizing voice and provided a smokescreen for the colonial anxiety of Australian nation-making became divested from its own centrality and interested in the broader significance of Australia as a multicultural nation. The drastic conceptual shifts and progression of Australian literature opened toward 'emphasising the singularities and specificities of representation and imaginings of space and place' (Mead 2009: 556). Beneath the rhetoric of Australian nationalism the influence of modernism created a polymorphous social and political voice representing a convergence of cultural, environmental, and national identities.

NEW ZEALAND AND PACIFIC WRITING

Oceanic writing, including New Zealand and South Pacific literatures, represents a further variant of modernism. As New Zealand's literary development in the last century shows strong continuities with Australia's, it will serve to examine the influence and development of modernism as a separate though not disconnected case. Due to their remote locale, often tumultuous political makeup, and history of colonialism, the South Pacific Islands (Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Nauru, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tonga, as well as those related to New Zealand: West Samoa, the Cooke Islands, Niue, and Tokelau) will form a separate, and regrettably brief, case study. The historical developments of modernism and the reclamation of a nationalist literature representative of Indigenous voices within these nations show strong contiguities, although the timeframe differs greatly.

While Katherine Mansfield, who left the country at the age of 19 and fell into the whorl of European modernism, remains New Zealand's most prominent literary daughter, the history of domestic New Zealand literature is much more parochial. Due to economic pressure and a lack of publishers, the first half of twentieth-century New Zealand literature was dominated by the short story and poetry, both of which formed intricate traditions through which national culture was defined. Another defining factor in the development of New Zealand literary history was the dominance of Calvinism, a religious puritanism influential since the time of colonization (Stenhouse 2012: *passim*). Literature in the early twentieth century was controlled by a small number of influential journalists and editors, namely Alan Mulgan, Pat Lawlor, Charles Marris, and O.N Gillespie, who held a younger generation to puritan standards, often rejecting their works over the possibility of moral offence (Edmond

2002: 1186). The publication of exclusively Puritan female writers Jessie Mackay, Eileen Duggan, and Ursula Bethell worked to reinforce strong ties between the church and the literary establishment. The stranglehold of Puritanism was eventually lessened as social distress during the 1930s was shaped into political attacks on the conservative social structure, although the construction of the nation's literature would retain its patriarchal, colonial voice for many decades. The 1930s saw the founding of literary and politically progressive journals *The Phoenix* (eds R.A.K. Mason and Frank Sargeson) and *Oriflamme* (eds Denis Glover and Ian Milner) as well as Caxton Press, led by Sargeson, Glover, Curnow, and Fairburn.

The publication of a national anthology such as Allen Curnow's *A Book of New Zealand Verse* (1945), his *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960), or Ian Wedde's 1985 *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, has always been a national event, and the histories which these editors provide continue to prove contentious ground for the definition of New Zealand literary culture. Both Eileen Duggan and Pat Lawlor reacted strongly against Curnow's patriarchal revisionism in the 1945 anthology, and the drawing of further divisions between the anti-puritan young writers and the literary establishment. Out of this continuing debate would come prominent historians and novelists such as W.H. Oliver, Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair, and the poet James K. Baxter. The introduction to Curnow's 1960 anthology was contentious for its revisionism and for his calling younger poets 'to name those "nameless native hills"' (Curnow 1960: 66) and continuing to define the nation in colonial terms. Curnow's anthology included some nineteenth-century Maori songs in translation, although this was criticized as reinforcing the centrality of English. The inclusion of song and chants in Maori in Wedde's anthology followed largely in Curnow's path, and reinforced the thesis of Robert Chapman's influential essay 'Fiction and the Social Pattern' which expressed his belief in New Zealand's social homogeneity. Working to break the myth of New Zealand's social homogeneity were mid century writers such as Robin Hyde, Ursula Bethell, and Fleur Adcock along with Roderick Finlayson and Dan Davin who were working towards a more progressive modernism than the dominant social realism which typified the period.

The myth of social homogeneity has since imploded, as Edmond argues, noting that with the publication of Witi Ihimera's novel *Tangi* (1973) Maori culture and literature has revived and come to the forefront in New Zealand. Poets such as Hone Tuwhare, and novelist-poets Keri Hulme (whose *The Bone People* won the 1985 Booker Prize) and Patricia Grace continue to write in a hybrid cultural tradition that fuses Maori oral and English literary traditions. The century defined by modernism internationally is, in New Zealand, the time it took the country's literature to stop defining itself solely in relation to colonialism. Twentieth-century literature in New Zealand represents less a literary tradition than a social transformation in which the barriers of access were broken and New Zealand literature was redefined by the representation of the country's multicultural, post-colonized voices.

Indigenous literature in the Pacific Islands has long suffered from the pangs of isolation, lack of publishers, and small audiences. The founding of the University of the South Pacific in 1968 alleviated some of these issues, and the founding of *Mana Review* created a permanent home for much Indigenous Pacific writing, as well as for the critical discourses surrounding Pacific literature. The development of a home for Pacific writing has helped to end the exploitative, ideologically driven, ethnographic,

and voyeuristic writing of coloniality which typified representations of the Pacific Islands throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the most prominent writers and theorists to come out of this area is Albert Wendt, whose seminal essay 'Towards a New Oceania' calls for the creation of a new regional literature representing the diverse oral and literary traditions of the islands, and through which writers can explore the complexity of contemporary South Pacific culture in the transition from traditional to modernist writing (Wendt 1976: 53). Other Pacific writers of note include the feminist and nationalist poet, Grace Mera Molisa, from Vanuatu. The Tongan-Fijian writer Epeli Hau'ofa's short stories and novels explore the region's complex customs. Tongan writer and professor Konai Thaman's work has developed a burgeoning following in the region. Novelist and critic Subramani publishes in both English and Fijian-Hindi, and won international acclaim for his 1988 collection of short stories *The Fantasy Eaters*, which he followed up with a series of books exploring Indian settlement in Fiji, as well as contemporary narratives of Indo-Fijian expatriates. With its focus on this complex, multilingual, and multicultural area, Wendt's essay provided a solid foundation for the further development of a diverse literary culture representing the specificities of place *and* past in the South Pacific.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AUSTRALIAN MUSICAL FIRST MODERNISM



Graeme Skinner

The historiography of Australian early musical modernism in the 1920s and 1930s has steadily advanced since the mid-1990s as part of a general reassessment of Australian musical culture before the 1960s (Brown *et al.* 1995; Whiteoak and Scott-Maxwell 2003; Sitsky 2001, 2005; Richards 2007). But the history it describes is still amorphous, and some of the unpublished music has simply disappeared.¹ Feminist counter-narratives of modernity and modernism have helped plug this gap (e.g. Hunt 2011), while multi-author topical and cross-genre studies have widened the academic focus beyond the individual creative input of composers and the analysis of individual historians. The semi-autonomous responses of performers and listeners, and of traditional (reiterative) communities to modernization are now being counted as historical factors in understanding a lost era in Australian culture. Indeed, the ‘postmodern’ diversity of these studies paradoxically hinders their reduction to a conventionally modernist historical narrative that might have been summarized here. But though composers and works must now share the limelight, the historical record will probably continue to recognize the distinctive role that Australian performers, commentators, and audiences accorded them, as representatives and ambassadors of their art music culture between the wars.

As late as the 1990s, the consensus was that the first modernism of Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky made little impact on Australia’s deeply conservative, largely Anglo-centric music culture between the two world wars, and that full modernization of Australian art music was only achieved when young Australian composers fell into the wake of 1950s European and American modernism. In this scenario, earlier (i.e. contemporary) Australian responses to the early European and American modernists represent only ‘thin tracks that mark Australia’s path’ to a very much later flowering modernism (Sitsky 2005: 6).

What participants described as a ‘new wave’ and a ‘revolution’ occurred between 1960 and 1965, when a home-grown Australian avant-garde finally emerged. This small, loosely connected group of younger composers was strategically promoted at home and abroad by supporters in government, the state-funded orchestral and broadcast network, universities, and the press (Sitsky 1965; Peart 1966; also Murdoch 1977; Callaway and Tunley 1978). This 1960s cohort retained symbolic value for

second and third generations of composers that benefitted from, built upon, and reacted against its achievements. As English-born adoptive Australian composer and broadcaster Andrew Ford summed up in 1993: 'The beginning of Richard Meale's career, along with the rise of Peter Sculthorpe's and Nigel Butterley's careers in the early 1960s, effectively marked the beginning of contemporary music in Australia' (Ford 1993: 31).

Roger Covell (1967) offered an historical apparatus for this late foundation myth, describing the nineteenth-century establishment of a 'transplanted', 'provincial', 'subsidiary' British settler-colonial music culture that only in the 1870s and 1880s began to reconcile with the legacy of the first Viennese school. But despite potentially invigorating input from local streams ('traditional' bush and urban workers' songs, Indigenous music and culture, natural and environmental conditions), Australia's resident composers in the first half of the twentieth century were hamstrung by conservative training, 'lack of free circulation of regenerative ideas', and 'a feeling of cultural inferiority inescapable in a neo-colonial or provincial society' (Covell 1967: 146). No one before Covell had so thoughtfully assessed and compared the work of leading resident composers active between the 1930s and 1950s, including Roy Agnew, Miriam Hyde, Clive Douglas, Margaret Sutherland, John Antill, Raymond Hanson, Dorian Le Gallienne, James Penberthy, and Robert Hughes. But most of them (only Agnew and Le Gallienne were dead, all the others still composing), comparing Covell's critical accounting of their achievements and shortcomings with his more energized, open-ended introductions to their younger colleagues, probably only confirmed their well-documented suspicion that they were indeed the losers in the 1960s 'revolution' (Symons 1997; McNeill 2014).

In 1967, 'modern' and 'modernism' were yet to be reinstated as the independent descriptors that they had been in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, and little music-historical writing in Australia before the 1990s made much use of either concept. Some historians of other art forms reasonably questioned, then and now, whether a modernism revealing itself as late as the 1960s could be genuine. And indeed, signs of the late flowering wilting early became increasingly evident through the 1970s, as Sculthorpe, Dreyfus, and Meale forged after-modern identities. In 1977, Covell suggested 'An end to modernity in music'; the crusade had lost its zeal, few would mourn its passing, contemporary music-making was 'various, bewildering, inconclusive, and likely to remain so' (1977: 22, 25).

But Covell's 1967 analysis of Australian music's failure to modernize earlier belonged within an historical tradition that saw similar failures across most of Australia's political and cultural life between the world wars. In a subtle reworking of this thesis in 1995, cultural historian John Williams characterized 'Australian reactions to modernism 1913–39' as those of a 'quarantined culture' responding to the recent traumas of nationhood (1901) and war (60,000 deaths, 150,000 other casualties) by turning in upon itself and nurturing deep nostalgia for its pre-modern past. By 1921, this 'cultural quarantine' was being enforced by:

[A]n inchoate grouping of racial supremacists, anti-Semites, anti-bolshevists, protectionists, anti-industrialisers and the leaders of an elitist and conservative art-world Establishment – men, mostly, who as individuals often manifested many of the foregoing traits', [while] 'young Australian men appeared to lose

interest in the making of music, art and literature...as though these activities had become effete and feminised.

(Williams 1995: 5–6)

However, a modernist fringe appears in Australian art music in the 1920s and 1930s, with the state-funded Sydney Conservatorium playing an equivocal role in breaching the quarantine (Collins 2001). Its first director, Henri Verbrugghen, sponsored a branch of the progressive British Music Society in 1920, which also became an effective conduit of new work by local modernist composers such as Arthur Benjamin and Roy Agnew, and recent continental European music. By 1928 students and staff had activated a local branch of the International Society of Contemporary Music. There were close connections between Conservatorium staff and Sydney's active Theosophical Society; the society brought the young Elisabeth Lutyens (later Britain's 'first serialist') to the city in 1926 with her activist mother Emily, and it became a spiritual home of composer Phyllis Campbell (Fraser 2001). Art historians have noted the Conservatorium's 'synaesthetic sensibility' (Eagle 1989: 44), evident in the 1919 'colour music' paintings of student Roy De Maistre, and a lively interest in Scriabin, represented in a string of local premieres by pianists Agnew, Winifred Burston (a Busoni pupil), and Henry Penn (see also Alderton 2011; Wierzbicki 2012). The Russian modern Leo Ornstein interested students, especially after Agnew borrowed Ornstein's most incendiary title for his own *Dance of the Wild Men* (which Benno Moiseiwitsch championed during his 1920 Australian tour). Student Jack Ellitt was already aware of Alexander Mossolov's work before he left the Conservatorium in 1927 for England. There he produced an experimental two-piano score for fellow expatriate, New Zealander Len Lye's experimental animated film *Tusalava* (1929), based on Indigenous mythology and motifs surrounding the Arrernte witchetty grub totem as documented by anthropologist Baldwin Spencer, friend of Percy Grainger (Horrocks 2000). In 1929, when Arthur Benjamin returned to Sydney to play with the Conservatorium Orchestra, most of the press coverage concerned the recent success in England and Germany of his provocatively jazz-inspired 'Concertino'. Benjamin would be subjected to the most notorious modernist musical quarantine of all by being included, between 'Antheil, George', and 'Berg, Alban', on Goebbels's list of 108 proscribed musicians in 1935 (Geiger 2002). Benjamin was not the only Australian to fall afoul of the Nazis: Sydney Conservatorium graduate and later jazz musician Roy Maling's ballet *Roksanda*, to have been performed in Stuttgart in early 1933, was prevented by 'the anti-foreign feeling which has grown up in German artistic circles' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1933: 4); instead, with dancers from Misha Burlakov and Louise Lightfoot's First Australian Ballet company and the Conservatorium Orchestra, Maling's 'ultra-modern' score – recalling the 'polytonality and queerly angular effects of Stravinsky' – was premiered in Sydney in June 1933 (Cooper 2002).

On the national scale, and on the basis of works composed between the wars alone, residents Roy Agnew in Sydney, Hooper Brewster-Jones (composer of the first atonal works in Australia) in Adelaide (Sitsky 2005: 6–31; Bowan 2007), Margaret Sutherland in Melbourne (Symons 1997), as well as expatriates Grainger, Benjamin, Ellitt, Peggy Glanville-Hicks (a student of Vaughan Williams, Boulanger, and Wellesz) (Roberts 2009), and Elsie Hamilton (anthroposophist, pioneer of just intonation)

(*The Musical Times*, 1 January 1918: 25; Bowan 2012) were individually significant. Significant too, corporately, by the mid-1930s, were the expanding orchestral, jazz, and broadcast activities of the national Australian Broadcasting Commission (Buzacott 2007). Commercial ballet companies – beginning with several touring reincarnations of the Ballet Russes and resident successors Borovansky, Kirsova, and Martyn companies – from 1936 onward delivered imported modernist musical works for the first time to large mixed audiences and commissioned new scores from residents such as Esther Rofe, Sutherland, and Le Gallienne into the 1940s (Crotty 1999; Carroll 2011).

Some inherited demarcation problems are yet to be addressed head on, however, including who, what, and when counts as genuinely *modernist*. Was inter-war Anglo-centrism necessarily anti-modernist as has been claimed? Or was the influence of Bax, Vaughan Williams, and Holst on Australian composers (Sutherland, Glanville-Hicks) and audiences actually modernizing? Biographical studies reclaiming Sutherland and Glanville-Hicks for modernism suggest so, while some composers not usually counted as modernists – e.g. Lindley Evans and Esther Kahn – nevertheless had modernist moments. In the 1920s, Kahn founded an Australian branch of the International Society of Musical Therapeutics as an adjunct to her work with psychiatric patients. In 1936, the soundtrack of one of Australia's first talkie feature films, Charles Chauvel's *Uncivilised*, includes some of the first Indigenous music that most urban settler Australians would have heard, and a score by Evans that shows surprising early awareness of cinematic scoring techniques.

Defining *Australian* is no less a problem. The expatriation of the best home-nurtured musical talent was a reality from the 1880s until the early 1960s. Among those who went abroad, and mostly stayed away, were Ada Crossley, George Clutsam, Grainger, Leila Waddell, Frederick Septimus Kelly, William Murdoch, W. J. Turner, George Boyle, Ernest Hutchinson, Arthur Benjamin, Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Alma Moodie (Dreyfus 2013), Noel Newton-Wood, Banks, Williamson, Joan Sutherland, and David Lumsdaine. Fellow composers and music historians alike have cited expatriation – Grainger's in particular – as historical evidence of lack of relevance to Australian music.

However, periodic returns by, notably, Grainger (1903, 1908–9, 1924, 1926, 1935) and Benjamin (1919–22, 1929, 1950), with performances of their recent works, did influence the way resident Australians thought about modern music. Ongoing local 'ownership' of their international activities helped embed Australians' positive musical self-image: for example, Benjamin's cantata in Hitchcock's 1934 *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and again in Alfred Hill's opera scene for Ken Hall's 1937 *The Broken Melody*. Even Constant Lambert and his 1927 jazz symphony *Rio Grande* were enlisted in the 1930s as Australian on the pretext that his father, the painter George Lambert, was. Conversely, the role of British-born but adoptive Australian composer-conductor-academics in Australia earlier in the century has been problematized. Some, such as Arundel Orchard and Edgar Bainton, have been characterized as hindering modernization of musical education between the wars, though advocates have tried to argue this was not the case with Fritz Hart, George Marshall-Hall, and Eugene Goossens (Sitsky 1965; Covell 1967: 145; Ford 1993: 31).

A far more difficult challenge to settler-fixated music histories is that of writing Indigenous Australians back into the musical record (c.f. visual arts, Anderson 2011).

Doing so requires rethinking historians' notions of musical modernity in stylistic terms and compositional practice. Indigenous first contact with British settler colonists was ongoing; though begun in the late eighteenth century, it did not occur in some remote communities until the early twentieth century (Reynolds 2013; White 1980; Swain 1993). An unequivocal instance of first contact with modern musical technology are the song recordings made in Hobart in 1899 and 1903 of Fanny Cochrane-Smith, the last fluent speaker of any Tasmanian Indigenous language². Unfortunately, similar recordings went on to be treated by many settler-colonist composers with early modernist agendas as abstract musical commodities, freely available to be sampled or copied (notably in film scores), while Indigenous Australian musicians were, with few exceptions (David Unaipon/Ngunaitponi, Harold Blair), effectively debarred from the public practice of early twentieth-century Australian art music.

Nevertheless, the positive potential of settler production based on Indigenous forms was widely canvassed across the arts, as part of a dual process of modernization and environmental acculturation/nationalization. In a 1938 manifesto of one small local literary movement, the Jindyworobaks, poet Rex Ingamells characterized such production as a plank of a 'conditional culture' (i.e. responding to conditions, not provisional) to bring settler Australian art 'into proper contact with its materials', and necessitating a 'fundamental break' with inherited Europeans modes of expression (qtd. in Kirkpatrick and Dixon 2012: 102).

Grainger similarly grounded his modernist practice in his environmentally conditioned Australian identity (Pear 2006). The reliability of his retrospective claims has been questioned, especially that he first imagined 'free music' in boyhood observations of wave patterns in the horizon of the Adelaide hills, and boating on Albert Park Lake in Melbourne. But evidence supports his 1956 claim that his Kipling setting, *The Beaches of Lukannon*, sketched in Frankfurt in December 1898 at the age of 16, was an early example of his 'mature harmonic style [...] harmony in unresolved discords. To the best of my knowledge, such a procedure was unknown at that time and must be considered an Australian contribution to musical progress' (Gilles *et al.* 2006: 17). He told an interviewer on his first return to Australia in 1903, aged 21, as a solo pianist touring with fellow expatriate contralto Ada Crossley:

I should like to become a successful composer. My hope is that I might be able to do something typical of Australia, which, of course, would be different from the music associated with any of the European countries. An Australian composition would have to possess dash, and be suggestive of warmth on account of the climate.

(*Referee*, October 1903: 10)

Having probably heard the newly popular setting of Banjo Paterson's bush-ballad 'Waltzing Matilda' in Australia, Grainger composed the first version of 'Australian Up Country Song' back in England ('Tone-wrought 1905'). On his longer second tour – again with Crossley's concert party in 1908–9, which took him into many Australian bush towns – he transcribed Australian Indigenous chants and New Zealand Polynesian Indigenous melodies from cylinder recordings by Baldwin Spencer (Barwell 2004). Back in England in 1911 he composed the 'Colonial Song', which he later (1959) characterized as 'an attempt to write a melody as typical of the

Australian countryside' (Slattery 1974: 91). If on his short 1924 Australian visit he admitted momentary self-doubts, when he returned in 1926 he highlighted the Australian and Polynesian impetus behind 'The Warriors', 'Colonial Song', and 'Marching Song of Democracy': the Adelaide and Melbourne performances were specially 'revised' versions completed on the voyage out.

Grainger's insistence on maintaining his Australian identity was not idiosyncratic expatriate nostalgia, but the international face of an established trend. His interest in Indigenous and 'up country' models was prefigured, and probably influenced by, home-based colleagues likewise pursuing 'conditional' possibilities prompted by European modernizing trends³. Alfred Hill had used New Zealand Māori melodies and rhythmic patterns since the late 1890s. In the mid-1930s, Hill and his second wife, composer Mirrie Solomon, joined in a remarkable, but yet to be properly understood, upsurge of interest in Australian Indigenous music, at home and internationally (Thomson 1980).

Both Māori and Australian Indigenous music had also interested Leon Caron. In 1926, his daughter Irma Caron, like Grainger based in New York, performed at the Three Arts Theatre (part of the progressive Little Theatre movement), featuring 'Javanese and New Zealand folk-songs and Australian aboriginal chants', songs by Hill, and a 'Māori Ballet' by her late father (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 1926: 10). Leon Caron, an Australian resident opera conductor since 1876, also composed most of the lost score for Australia's first popular 'futurist' musical, *Australis, or the City of Zero*, set in Sydney in the year 2000, which played throughout the Australian Federation ceremonies in January 1901.

In 1903, August Siede admonished his fellow Australian composers in futurist tones:

[T]he bush vibrates with magical rhythms; the very air palpitates with hidden melodies [...] The growing Australian multitude, virile and strenuous, surges to and fro in economic conflict, presenting materials for an epic of original mould, which transformed to tone, well might beget an immortal tune.

(*The Argus*, 28 September 1907: 6)

Siede left for Europe, where his lyric overture *An Australian Walpurgis Night* premiered in Dresden and played in Vienna, before coming to Melbourne in 1904. For Siede and George Marshall-Hall, both leading Melbourne conductors and composers, European musical 'ultra-modernity' meant Richard Strauss in particular, whose recent music had inspired a well-informed exchange of opinion in the letters columns of the Adelaide press, responding to comments by composer Bryceson Treharne, lecturer in piano at Adelaide University, and teacher and mentor of Hooper Brewster-Jones.

The earliest bush-themed composition with ongoing currency was Marshall-Hall's 1903 Symphony 'reflecting the scenic and climatic influences of Australian life during the composer's summer holidays on Sydney beaches' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 October 1917: 8). Premiered in London and Melbourne in 1907 and 1908, it was revived after his death by Henri Verbrugghen's New South Wales State Orchestra in Sydney in 1917, and again in Melbourne in 1919. Australian-resident British theatre conductor Howard Carr introduced a new choral ode, *The Bush*, in Sydney in 1909.

The year 1913 was of great significance. Press reportage from Europe and local performances of new work proliferated, beginning with syndicated cable reports in January of the Berlin premiere of *Pierrot Lunaire*. In March, Stravinsky was quoted: ‘The Viennese are barbarians. Their orchestral musicians could not play my *Petrushka*. They hardly know Debussy there, and they chased Schonberg away to Berlin’ (*Register*, 25 March 1913: 3). In June, a Sydney paper relayed reports of audience uproar at Schoenberg’s ‘terrible scale-practice’ in Vienna (*Evening News*, 21 June 1913: 6). The London premiere of *The Rite of Spring* was described by a leading Australian daily’s own correspondent, former Sydney city organist Arthur Mason, as ‘an orchestral medley of the weirdest and ugliest sounds imaginable’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September 1913: 8). There were notices from London of ‘Debussy and Tennis’ (*Jeux*) and the ‘Colour Organ’ (Scriabin’s *Prometheus*). With the European mail came three articles in *The Musical Times* – generously illustrated with music examples – on Scriabin’s harmonies, written by another expatriate George Clutsam, having had his new opera, *König Harlekin*, staged at Berlin’s Kurfürsten-Oper the previous November (Clutsam 1913a, 1913b, 1913c). Just as Nijinsky had danced it in London, in August there was another Sydney performance of *L’après midi d’un faune*. William Murdoch, touring as accompanist for Clara Butt, performed ten Debussy pieces around the state capitals and in his hometown Bendigo, where the press noted ‘a spirited reception for Debussy’ (*Bendigo Advertiser*, 4 August 1913: 7). And, following its first Australian outing by the touring English Quinlan Opera Company in 1912, Puccini’s *The Girl of the Golden West* was revived for a second season in Sydney in November, less than three years after its New York world premiere. Reports of Leo Ornstein’s futurist provocations in London in early 1914 were among the last musical news to get through to Australia before war reporting drowned out most other transmissions.

Partly in response to the war, and after the death of his teacher Marshall-Hall in 1915, his former student, Melbourne composer, reviewer, and poet Henry Tate, produced an influential series of press articles between 1916 and 1924 essaying ‘possibilities’ for a future Australian music, and the advantages of maintaining a national and stylistic quarantine. Initially energized by what he saw as Russia’s wresting of the musical vanguard from Germany, he developed the idea that conditional materials such as bush sounds, bird calls, and – eventually – Indigenous chant and culture offered suitable resources for local composers, to mitigate new techniques and technologies they could access from abroad.

Openness to local ‘conditional’ and non-traditional imported inputs subtends Australian modernism, linking Grainger, Agnew, Brewster-Jones, and Ellitt with earlier and later composers such as Caron, Hill, Clive Douglas, and John Antill. Agnew keenly acknowledged a shared impetus behind Grainger’s *The Warriors* and his own *Dance of the Wild Men*. Mining his press portfolio in 1922, a Sydney journalist quoted an English critique: ‘with Percy Grainger and Roy Agnew, a distinctly Australian note has been introduced into modern music, thus enhancing the wealth of musical material by the weirdness and beauty of aboriginal rhythms hitherto unknown in their wonderful possibilities’ (*Cumberland Argus*, 15 February 1922: 2).

NOTES

1. This situation is replicated among most of Australia's post-colonial Oceanic neighbours, though because of the very different cultural conditions pertaining in almost every case, any attempt to treat them as a group would be more misleading than useful.
2. Two of Smith's song recordings are streamed online at the National Registry of Recorded Sound (Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive): <<http://aso.gov.au/titles/music/fanny-cochrane-smith-songs>>, where they can be compared with earlier recordings by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait (1888): <<http://aso.gov.au/titles/music/1898-torres-strait-recordings>>.
3. Nellie Melba was also a pattern for Grainger and other Australian moderns. Not to be discounted as a modernist figure in her own right, her international opera celebrity status was itself an early modernist phenomenon. Melba was also an early recording artist, and collaborated with at least one major modernist composer, Puccini, in early productions of his operas.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

STAGING MODERNITY IN THE 'NEW OCEANIA'

Modernism in Australian, New Zealand and Pacific Islands theatre



David O'Donnell

In histories of the theatre of Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific, the term 'modernism' is most often used to describe drama that exhibits qualities of the anti-realist twentieth century European avant-garde. Movements frequently cited as models for the leaders of Australian theatrical modernism include expressionism, epic theatre, surrealism, and absurdism.¹ However, in discussing modernism in Pacific theatre it is also important to include the influence of the 'modern' realist drama of the late nineteenth century. Not only was realism the first 'modern' movement in Pacific theatre, it also became a crucial strategy in staging post-colonial identity from the mid twentieth century onwards. For white playwrights in Australia and New Zealand, realism was the basis of nationalist drama that distanced settler cultures from those of the British Isles, on which the theatre culture had originally been based. Furthermore, some Indigenous playwrights, such as the Aboriginal (Noongar) writer Jack Davis, began writing realist scripts in order to communicate clear political messages to white and Indigenous audiences.

COLONIAL THEATRE AS A PRODUCT OF MODERNITY

Although Australia, New Zealand, and the larger South Pacific Islands are now independent nations with distinctive characteristics, they share a common history as European colonies in the South Pacific. As former British colonies, Australia and New Zealand remain closely bound by shared political, economic, and cultural values, and the practices of theatre production and playwriting in both countries were originally closely modelled on British theatre conventions.

The British colonial project in the South Pacific was implicitly linked to the spread of modernity across the globe. In Australia and New Zealand the creation of the main cities led to a mimicking of the industrialization that occurred simultaneously in Europe (albeit on a smaller scale). In New Zealand, expansive areas of sub-tropical rainforest were destroyed in order to create large-scale agricultural production, much of which was intended for British markets, especially after the introduction of refrigerated ships in the 1880s. While ships conveyed agricultural produce towards Britain, ships sailing in the opposite direction brought 'culture' in the form of

theatrical entertainments. Australia and New Zealand were part of a large touring circuit that also took in South East Asia, the United States, and Canada. Theatrical production in both colonies in the 1880s was a mixture of popular entertainment including romantic and sensation melodramas, music hall, Shakespeare, and opera.

The tour of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* to Australia and New Zealand in 1899 was a striking contrast to the usual theatrical fare in both colonies (Thomson 1979). The feminist themes struck a chord, as the issue of women’s suffrage was contentious in both colonies. Shortly after this tour, New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1903) became two of the first countries in the world to give women the vote. The Ibsenesque realist form, with its attention to the social zeitgeist and use of local detail, would later be adopted strongly by both white and Indigenous playwrights.

As modern drama developed in Europe and the United States through the first half of the twentieth century, Australian and New Zealand theatres reflected these trends to some degree. However, in both countries, the theatre remained a mixture of amateur performances and commercial touring by companies such as J.C. Williamsons until the 1950s and 1960s. With the professionalization that occurred in theatre from the 1950s onwards, the impact of overseas modernism became more acute.² The population of Australia was approximately five times that of New Zealand, and therefore the professional theatre infrastructure and audiences developed roughly in that proportion as well. Among the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea has the population to support the government-funded National Performing Arts Troupe (formerly the National Theatre Company). In the much smaller populations of the South Pacific Islands, there is little ongoing theatre infrastructure at all, with the notable exception of the independent Wan Smolbag company in Vanuatu and a history of theatre production in communities and educational institutions such as the University of the South Pacific in Suva. Despite this, the influence of Indigenous playwrights is felt right through the Pacific, particularly in Hawai’i. Furthermore, companies such as Pacific Underground and Kila Kokonut Krew, formed by Pacific Island migrants and their descendants, have made a very significant contribution to professional theatre in New Zealand.

AUSTRALIAN MODERNISM: THE NEW WAVE AND THE REJECTION OF REALISM

In Australia, the realist ‘modern drama’, with its emphasis on domestic settings, local customs and vernacular language aligned closely with the growing desire for a theatre that reflected the reality of everyday Australians’ lives. Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) set the benchmark for realist Australian drama based on interrogating notions of national (white settler) identity. The play set a strong feminine energy in conflict with ‘ocker’ males – broad-accented working-class Australians who quickly became a recognizable type. This nationalist project grew in the 1970s with the ‘new wave’ of playwrights such as David Williamson, Jack Hibberd, and Alexander Buzo, described as ‘rebellious larrikins’ who both celebrated and questioned ‘ocker’ stereotypes of white male Australian identity (McCallum 2009: 139).

When the word ‘modernism’ is used in histories of Australian drama, it is almost exclusively associated with the Nobel prize-winning novelist/playwright Patrick White. In the 1950s White’s first novels created significant controversy as he was

accused of writing 'modernist rubbish' (Kruse 1987: 306) but later recognized for having been ahead of his time (305). White's quasi-expressionistic play *The Ham Funeral* (written in 1947 but not performed until 1961) caused controversy when the Board of Governors of the Adelaide festival rejected the play because of a scene in which two bag ladies find an aborted fetus (McCallum 2009: 94).

White's experimentation paved the way for a broad acceptance of theatrical modernism in the 1970s and 1980s, emerging from the new wave. Jack Hibberd, John Romeril, Alexander Buzo, Dorothy Hewett, and Alma De Groen are important playwrights in establishing modernist dramaturgy at the centre of Australian drama rather than on the fringes.

Working against the 'ocker' stereotype were some feminist playwrights, exemplified by Dorothy Hewett, whose *The Chapel Perilous* (1971) was one of the most colourful statements in feminist modernism. In this non-realist play Hewett embraces theatricality in using song, poetry, mask work, amplified voices, and a large chorus, reflecting the influences of Brecht, vaudeville, and verse drama.

Louis Nowra and Stephen Sewell have formidable reputations as innovators in Australian playwriting. Nowra's *Inner Voices* (1977) is a chilling theatrical representation of political power structures, a dream play with strong symbolist and expressionist elements. Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (1983) also looks at the multiple dimensions of power. Sewell's dramaturgy is a heightened realism verging on expressionism at its most nightmarish extreme, as in the finale of *Blind Giant* where revolutionaries besiege the offices of a political party.

Alma De Groen's early experimentation with the Theatre of the Absurd in plays such as *The Sweatproof Boy* (1972) led to the influential *The Rivers of China* (1987). This work of 'philosophical science fiction' juxtaposes the death of the writer Katherine Mansfield at Fontainebleau in the 1920s with a Sydney hospital in a future where patriarchy has been overthrown and women now dominate society (McCallum 2009: 196). *The Rivers of China* gains extra resonance from the knowledge that Mansfield is one of New Zealand's most iconic modernist writers.

At the same time that the most inventive white Australian playwrights were embracing modernism and rejecting realism, the visionary Noongar playwright Jack Davis was reinventing the realist tradition from the perspective of colonial modernity. In plays such as *The Dreamers* (1982) Davis deliberately appropriated the social realism of the earlier white Australian writers to raise the awareness of white audiences about the oppression of Aboriginal people, both in the past and the present. Davis recognized the potential of theatre to reach a wide audience and was further inspired to write drama after reading the plays of Chekhov (Casey 2004: 132). *The Dreamers* portrays a dysfunctional family eking out an existence in poverty in the suburbs, using the style of domestic realism. Davis' use of realism serves a powerful political purpose. Davis bends realism towards an Aboriginal perspective through the incorporation of Aboriginal dance punctuating the domestic scenes.

The Aboriginal plays that followed often abandoned realism altogether, as influenced by traditional Aboriginal arts and storytelling as they were by the twentieth-century international avant-garde. *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1996) by Murri artists Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman uses Indigenous performance elements along with symbolism to extrapolate from a solo female performer to an entire history of Aboriginal disenfranchisement through colonization.

THE GROWTH OF MODERNISM IN NEW ZEALAND THEATRE

In the major studies of New Zealand theatre, the word 'modernist' is used seldom if at all. However, there were some significant if isolated instances of the international modernist avant-garde. Most striking was the influence of expressionism in the works of Eric Bradwell and J.A.S. Coppard in the 1930s. The use of a chorus and rhythmic repetition in Bradwell's *Clay* (1936) reflects the influence of Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (McNaughton 1981: 33). Coppard's *Machine Song* (1939) takes the audience into the mind of a factory worker reduced to a machine-like status by the repetitive nature of his work, clearly showing the influence of American expressionism.

In the 1940s there was a trend towards verse plays as 'distant ripples of the poetic drama revived by Auden and Eliot in the thirties' (Thomson 1984: 33). The best of these was Allen Curnow's *The Axe* (1948), a verse drama dramatizing the arrival of Christian missionaries in the Cook Islands. While *The Axe* displays the influence of high modernist British drama, the subject matter is radically different, portraying a sympathetic view of Indigenous Pacific people and pointing towards the later post-colonial theatre created by Māori and Pacific practitioners.

The colonization of Māori was also the subject of some of the strongest plays by Bruce Mason, the major figure in New Zealand theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. Mason's *The Pohutukawa Tree* (1956) is written in the style of heightened realism, partially influenced by the rituals and oratory of the Māori people.

Modernism's influence is also apparent in the plays of Mervyn Thompson, a director/lecturer/performer who was at the forefront of the anti-realist movement in the 1970s. In the introduction to his first play, *First Return* (1974), Thompson cites his influences as 'the expressionistic dramas of Strindberg and Toller, the dream sequences in *Death of a Salesman*, the ritual structure of *Marat/Sade*, Fellini's 8 ½, and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*' (1984: 22). *First Return*'s openly expressionist form contains hints of all of these influences, centred on a young man who is tortured by an alter ego named 'The Accuser' and a chorus of demons.

In New Zealand playwriting modernism also meant minimalist dialogue and ambiguous characters and situations reminiscent of Beckett, as in Robert Lord's first play *It Isn't Cricket* (1971). The influence of minimalism continued in the next generation of playwrights, notably in Jo Randerson's absurdist *Fold* (1995), in which a succession of shallow birthday parties facilitate a satire of the prejudices and self-interest of middle-class white New Zealanders.

The 1970s counter-culture movement led to a number of non-realist companies being set up outside of the mainstream theatres. The foremost of these was Red Mole, which began as an artists collective in 1974 and continued until the deaths of its co-founders Sally Rodwell and Alan Brunton in the mid-2000s. Self-described as 'a volatile mix of satire, rhythm 'n' blues, slapstick, shouting and Cubo-Futurist performance' (Brunton 1989: back cover), Red Mole's work was a dynamic collage of modernist styles, drawing heavily on surrealism, with extensive use of masks, large puppets, cartoonish characters, dance, and physical theatre.

From the 1980s New Zealand playwrights became more confident in writing non-realist plays, or incorporating modernist influences into otherwise realist work. For example, *Foreskin's Lament* (1980) by Greg McGee portrays characters from a

small-town rugby team, a metaphor for the conservative patriarchal values dominating New Zealand society. *Foreskin's Lament* is the closest equivalent in New Zealand to *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, a well-crafted realist play with working-class characters, laced with vernacular language, and capturing a powerful sense of the national zeitgeist. Yet at the end of this realist play, McGee breaks the fourth wall, when the protagonist delivers a lengthy monologue in the style of beat poetry, 'lamenting' the tragic death of the team captain replete with references to Burroughs, Kerouac, Kesey, and Kubrick.

As in Australia, by the 1990s a confident modernism was well established in the mainstream. In the introduction to *Squatter* (1987), a pseudo-epic about Canterbury's large feudal estates in the late nineteenth century, Stuart Hoar mentions Brecht and Max Frisch, foreshadowing his Marxist historiographic approach. The play's *verfremdungseffekts* include the frequent use of anachronistic dialogue and lead characters breaking role to speak directly to the audience. Expressionism's influence endures in David Geary's *Lovelock's Dream Run* (1993), which mixes dream and reality in overlapping a gay schoolboy's fantasies about the Olympic gold medalist Jack Lovelock with the rise to power of the Nazis. Jean Betts' Brechtian influence was intriguingly developed when she adapted John Fuegi's book *Brecht and Co.* (1994) into a play called *The Collective* (2003), a pastiche of Brechtian theatre exposing the writer's exploitation of his female collaborators.

Like the first Aboriginal plays, some early Māori theatre works such as Riwia Brown's *Roimata* (1988), were in the vein of domestic realism, examining social issues affecting urban Māori. However, there were also Māori theatre works which were overtly political, performed in a more Brechtian fashion, such as the touring agitprop production *Maranga Mai* (1980). Since the 1980s Māori writers have increasingly blended Western realism with Indigenous cultural elements, creating innovative syncretic theatre that produces 'new theatrico-aesthetic principles' (Balme 1996: 180). The constant presence of a stylized chorus of *tīpuna* (ancestors) in Hone Kouka's *Waiora* (1996) may resemble expressionism, yet is entirely based in principles of *Te Ao Māori* (Māori worldview).

INTERCULTURAL CONNECTIONS IN PACIFIC ISLAND THEATRE

In the same period that Aboriginal and Māori playwrights were making their way into mainstream theatre, several writers in the Pacific Islands were also fusing elements of Western modernist theatre with Indigenous themes and cultural practices. These include Vilsoni Hereniko (Rotuma/Fiji), Larry Thomas (Fiji), John Wills Kaniku (Papua New Guinea) and Nora Vagi Brash (Papua New Guinea). Brash's plays consider the effects of urbanization and modernization on the people of Papua New Guinea (Keown 2007: 115). In *Which Way, Big Man?* (1976) she satirizes the pretensions of corrupt local bureaucrats, using Pacific comic techniques similar to those adapted by Fijian and Samoan playwrights.

In a seminal essay first published in 1976, Samoan writer Albert Wendt argued that Pacific arts should reflect the 'new Oceania', blending international modernist influences with Indigenous ways of art-making, 'free of the taint of colonialism' (Wendt 1993: 12). Wendt's vision was reflected in the career of John Kneubuhl, born

in American Samoa to a high-born Samoan mother and American father. Kneubuhl studied with Thornton Wilder at Yale, went on to write for Honolulu’s Community Theatre, and later worked as a Hollywood scriptwriter in the 1950s and 1960s. Kneubuhl’s *Think of a Garden* (1992) is undoubtedly one of the most powerful examples of Pacific playwriting. Kneubuhl’s intercultural influences are clearly evident as he balances the heightened realism of a memory play in the vein of Tennessee Williams, with a profound sense of *fa’asamoa* (Samoan customs or the ‘Samoan way’).

Albert Wendt’s *The Songmaker’s Chair* (2004) also uses a family narrative to depict the complex relationship between modernity and *fa’asamoa*. The play reveals a dying Samoan patriarch’s complex relationship with his family, still coming to terms with assimilating to Western lifestyles 40 years after migrating to New Zealand. Wendt interweaves heightened realism with Samoan performance forms, including clowning routines reminiscent of those in Hereniko’s plays. Like Jack Davis’ realist plays written 20 years previously, Wendt’s five-act play proves that realist dramaturgy interwoven with Indigenous performance elements can still be a potent tool for Pacific artists re-examining the ‘shock of the new’.

REFLEXIVE MODERNITY IN CONTEMPORARY PACIFIC THEATRE

The impact of modernity and modernist art forms remains central to theatre in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. Since the fertile proliferation of modernist dramaturgy in the 1980s, techniques which in Patrick White’s time were seen as radically avant-garde became common in Australian theatre with a new generation creating a sophisticated post-nationalist Australian theatre. Daniel Keene and Andrew Bovell are two of the most skilled of these. In Keene’s *Half and Half* (2002) two estranged half-brothers gradually recreate their mother’s garden and burial plot in the kitchen of the family home. The juxtaposition of nature and the domestic setting recalls the Theatre of the Absurd, yet at the conclusion the brothers reconcile, and as it begins to rain inside the kitchen, the implications are optimistic.

In Andrew Bovell’s *When the Rain Stops Falling* (2009), the rainfall imagery is apocalyptic rather than hopeful. The non-chronological narrative of the play ranges between Australia and London over 50 years and several generations of interlinked families. The play connects a horrific act of paedophilia with the environmental catastrophe of climate change. The play’s consistent imagery of extreme climate change, extinction of species, and fears that the world is ending represents the failure of modernity to provide a sustainable world for its citizens.

Māori theatre evolved from its political focus in the 1970s and 1980s to a more epic phase in the 1990s; by the turn of the century new work by younger Māori also moved towards a sense of reflexive modernity. Mitch Tawhi Thomas’ *Have Car Will Travel* (2001) blends the modernist trope of being ‘on the road’ with contemporary questions about justice and racism. Much of the play is set in cars driving on lonely back roads, where Māori brothers kidnap a ‘white trash’ couple and enact a symbolic revenge for the death of their grandmother, who was raped and killed in a home invasion by white punks. In Rachel House’s striking production, the actors created



Figure 30.1 The failure of modernity to provide for its children: Gabrielle York (Sophie Hambleton) and Gabriel Law (Richard Chapman) in Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling*. Reproduced courtesy of Circa Theatre. Photograph: Stephen A'Court.

the sense of constant motion through physical theatre routines where their miming of driving the car against a cinematic-style cyclorama becomes almost dance-like. The play enacts violence through actions and language, leaving uncomfortable questions about New Zealand's supposedly harmonious bi-cultural paradise.

A political backlash against increased government support for Māori-inspired Miria George's *and what remains* (2004), an allegory portraying a futuristic New



Figure 30.2 Indigenous science fiction: Mary (Erina Daniels, far left), the last Māori woman to leave New Zealand, waits in an airport departure lounge in Miria George's *and what remains*. Photographer: Matt Grace. © Tawata Productions.

Zealand where all Māori people have been forced to leave. The play’s setting in an airport departure lounge evokes an unsettling liminality, while the spare dialogue, employing frequent repetition and charged pauses, alternately threatening and ironic, recalls early Pinter. The play is notable for its lack of references to Māori cultural iconography as used in the 1990s epic plays.

CONCLUSION

Since the nineteenth-century tour of Ibsen’s *Doll’s House* to the Australasian colonies, many forms of theatrical modernism have influenced the practice of theatre-making. South Pacific modernism began with contemporary Ibsenesque realist drama, and asserted distinctive colonial identities for Indigenous and settler communities. In parallel, a dynamic anti-realist tradition emerged in the 1970s and 1980s following the inspiration of international modernist movements. As modernist avant-garde techniques became mainstream, realism and non-realism often blended. While Pacific theatre has undoubtedly been profoundly influenced by the changing trends in European modernism since the realist revolution of the 1890s, these influences have been adapted and re-worked into distinctive forms of modernism for the Pacific.

NOTES

1. For example, Carroll 1995: 164; Holloway 1987: 374, 568; McCallum 2009: 93, 187, 194, 211. Playwrights such as Eliot, Brecht, O’Neill, Albee, Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter are often mentioned as influences on key modernist playwrights (e.g. Carroll 1995: 86, 167, 199; Holloway 1987: 379, 449, 477, 479, 572; McCallum 2009: 94, 132, 149, 156, 365).
2. In Australia, significant milestones included the foundation of Melbourne’s Union Theatre Repertory Company in 1953 (this became the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1968), the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (1954), the Adelaide Festival of Arts (1960), the Old Tote (1962), the South Australian Theatre Company (1965), La Mama (1967), the Nimrod (1971), and the Sydney Theatre Company (1979). In New Zealand, similar developments saw the establishment of professional companies such as the New Zealand Players (1952), Downstage Theatre (1964), Mercury Theatre (1968), and the Court Theatre (1971).

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE MODERN PRIMITIVE AND THE ANTIPODES

The visual arts and Oceania



Ann Stephen and Andrew McNamara

We begin with a conclusion: the primitive does not refer to a classification of people or of a race, or any other cultural subset. No people describe themselves as primitive; the term is used to denigrate, and thus assumes a tremendous burden for its bearers. The primitive is often viewed as the antithesis of the modern – close to nature; soiled and devoid of technological sophistication; persisting in an unreflective, child-like state of elemental immediacy, all impulses and reactions. *Primitivism*, by contrast, should be viewed as the necessary invention of the modern.

But primitivism has also attracted as well as repelled. Alluringly for many, the primitive attracted admiration for its promise of a vivid symbolic consciousness. It resided on the knife-edge of envy and denunciation, projecting both alternate imaginative horizons and cultural and racial chauvinism. It has therefore oscillated through various, fluctuating stages of accusation and counter-accusation. This essay reveals that the discourse of primitivism is irretrievably implicated in the reception of modernism in certain nations and regions, particularly in Australasia. Drawing this implication does not endorse a Eurocentric conception of cultural transmission, but instead evokes a complex map of cultural coordinates.

A DIMINISHED PLACE ON THE WORLD CULTURAL MAP?

When the French surrealist map of the world was published in 1929 in the Belgian magazine *Variétés*, most Western democracies either disappeared or were shrunk (Aragon 1929). Australia was dwarfed by New Guinea. The world's only island continent was deemed a place of virtually no interest for modernism, at least in its surreal manifestation. With this contorted map, the surrealists asserted the priorities of their alternate imaginary: a world where Western modernity was overpowered by its alter-ego, an enchanted other possessing raw, primitive creative power – massive in scale, magical, superstitious, tradition-minded, communist or collectivist.

Yet, in reality, due to the influence of Indigenous cultural practices, Australia, from the late nineteenth century, was provoking revisions of common assumptions identified with social and aesthetic Western norms and insistence on rationality.

Indeed, the study of Australian and South Pacific Indigenous cultures shaped many early discourses of ethnography, anthropology, art history, psychiatry or psychoanalysis, as well as influencing art.

Take the case of the Aranda (or Arrernte, now the preferred spelling), ‘one of the best-known Aboriginal groups in world anthropology, having been the subject of many famous descriptive discourses, as well as heated and obscure debates concerning the nature of so-called “primitive” life’ (Morton 1992: 24). Like many Aboriginal cultures, having evolved no written language or literature, science, architecture or sculpture – or anything recognizable as such in Western terms – they were deemed low on the evolutionary scale of human progress, according to the prevailing model of Social Darwinism. Yet, over a decade before the surrealist map, Australian Aboriginal culture featured in some of the most audacious modernist avant-garde performances.

Far from central Australia, Tristan Tzara was busy in Zurich incorporating Arrernte song cycles into several of his *Poèmes Nègres*. Accompanied by wild drumming and cubist masks, the Arrernte songs featured in the dada performances of 1917 (Tzara 2006: 31–6). Their route from remote Central Australia to the Cabaret Voltaire reveals a nuanced, culturally alert process of translation, quite different from the wild ‘babble’ of other dadaists. Tzara had conducted ethnological studies across African, Aboriginal, Maori, and other South Pacific sources in Zurich’s Technical University Library (Browning 1972: 51). His source for songs like *Chanson du Serpent* and *Chanson du Cacadou* was the Central Australian Arrernte and Loritja cultures (Tzara 2006: 31–6). Their documentation by Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow – subsequently published as *Die Aranda-und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* – gave the songs a status equivalent to written cultures (Strehlow 1907–20). Tzara selected for his French translation, according to the linguist Walter Veit, Strehlow’s most literal, interlinear version, ‘a poetic solution between the meaningless sound [...] and the logical, syntactical discourse’ (Veit 2009: 45–89). This approach allowed Strehlow ‘to get closest to the original sound and rhythm which he could not fathom in any other way’ (Veit 2009: 57; see also Stephen 2009: 157).¹ Such literalness borders on abstraction as the sounds and rhythms of the Aboriginal words rubbed against foreign tongues. In Tzara’s performances, they exemplify cross-cultural exchange that challenged the Eurocentric distinctions of ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive.’

Earlier, in 1909, the Australian-American composer Percy Grainger, who experimented with mechanical and electronic sound art, first transcribed three Arrernte songs from wax cylinders recorded by the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer. Directly contradicting prevailing views of race-based primitivism, Grainger understood the songs’ formal complexity: ‘What lies stand in the Musical histories re. Australian native music, that it moves over a few notes only & is mere repetitions of primitive phrases; not at all!’ (Grainger 2006 [1934]: 46). Later, Grainger introduced excerpts into his radio broadcasts, describing them as ‘lithe and graceful as snakes and highly complex in their rhythmic irregularities’, concluding that most so-called ‘primitive music is too complex for untrained modern ears’ (48).

Like Tzara and Grainger, avant-gardist Len Lye’s practice was shaped by Indigenous cultures. After leaving New Zealand, he lived between Sydney and Samoa in the 1920s, studying South Pacific and Aboriginal collections. Sigmund Freud’s writing, particularly *Totem and Taboo*, further informed Lye’s remarkable first

animation, eventually completed in London in 1929. Its title, *Tusalava*, was ‘a circumspect Polynesian word inferring that eventually everything is just the same’ (Lye 1930: 12–15; see also Horrocks 2001: 92). Lye described his early ‘film drawings’ as ‘flat with a two dimensional movement. They are hard and definite, not abstract or scientific [...] dots are used to convey organic life in a primary stage’ (41–2). In representing the genesis of life across each hand-drawn film cell, which he regarded as analogous to biological cell division, Lye created a flickering kinetic energy in the form of abstract dance. The ‘dance’ suggests the dynamism resulting from Lye’s urging for interdisciplinary explorations of sound or movement, and his encounters with South Pacific Indigenous cultures.

Australian modernist Margaret Preston conducted similar research at much the same time, and in the same museums. Throughout the interwar years, she was the primary advocate of a sympathetic approach to ‘primitivism’ in art. Preston wished to promote an ‘Indigenous art of Australia’ – a national modernism – based on adopting Aboriginal art’s formal properties of earth colours and flat dynamic designs (Preston 2003b). Through articles and essays, and her own practice – which at this stage of her career meant showing the value of modernism by working on the cusp of art and design – Preston argued her case for a particular region- or nation-specific development of modernism with a missionary zeal, advocating for ‘Aboriginal art artfully applied’ (Preston 2003a; see also 2003c; 2003d: 57). Her approach rapidly gained popularity in mass culture, graphic design, architecture, and town planning. Yet what was provocative and innovative in 1924, signalling a new local modernism, became aligned with a fervent nationalism a decade later.

During the Second World War, Aboriginal art anchored a 1941 MOMA-organized North American touring exhibition, ‘The Art of Australia’. The exhibition ‘starts with the work of the aborigines and ends with the influence of their work as a basis of a new outlook for a national art for Australia’ (Ure Smith 1941: 38). The tour was extraordinarily successful and was the first of many to follow in the coming decades. Also in 1941, another major exhibition opened in Sydney inspired by Preston, as its title suggests: Australian Aboriginal Art and its Application. Now many white artists, architects, and designers were following Preston’s precedent and identifying their work as ‘Aboriginal’. This exhibition also included Indigenous contributions, introducing Albert Namatjira, a Western Arrernte man born on the Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg, to a contemporary audience. His watercolours did not use ochres or flatten the view, though his paintings do disturb European conventions of seeing by drawing the viewer into a deep space that wraps around, ‘forcing the peripheral vision of Western perception to be no longer peripheral, no longer out of focus’ (Burn and Stephen 1993: 263). Such a position of imaginary occupation inside the land differs from the elevated vision of the colonial frontier. Namatjira’s example popularized the idea of an Aboriginal relation to land, inspiring a Hermannsburg School and generations of future Indigenous artists.

REDRAWING THE MAP INSIDE OUT

In the late twentieth century, cross-cultural exchange in Australia profoundly changed. If Preston had been interpreted as defying prejudice against Aboriginal people and culture, her approach was now understood as cultural appropriation:

appropriating Aboriginal art without the Aborigines to advance a distinctive local modernism for non-Aboriginals. The next phase upends this dynamic as Aboriginal artists appropriate modern settler principles to advance the cause of traditional knowledge. By embracing innovation within traditional settings, the outcomes are still often ambiguous, but the artistic achievements assert a contemporary Indigenous perspective. As Ian McLean put it, the inversion clarifies how ‘Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art’ (2011). Witness the Papunya Tula painting movement in the early 1970s, whose success set a precedent for hundreds of communities. The painters aimed not simply to extol a traditional culture, but to articulate the tradition’s place within contemporary conditions. Whereas many modernists eagerly identified with primitivism to disrupt the narrative linking the modern with scientific and technological triumph, Indigenous artists looked simultaneously to traditional and to modern cultural perspectives.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri showed how such distinct ways of perceiving could be accommodated in his treatment of large-scale landscape works. His spatial-landscape organization was based on grasping how one series of events was ‘laid down on top of another in the Dreaming’ (Johnson 2003: 70). Clifford Possum’s innovation related to recognizing the ‘perceived parallel between the abstract diagrams of ancestral passage in these traditional expressive forms of his culture and the maps of the Europeans’ (79). These insights combined to produce the complex superimposition effects of his large canvases from the mid-1970s on.

This conjunction of contradictory cultural impulses is essential to grasping how Tjapaltjarri’s art functions ‘two ways’ or ‘bi-culturally’: the paintings must be understood as contemporary art and ‘more than just art’ in accordance with the customary expectations of his community (18). As Johnson asserts, while Tjapaltjarri could be highly experimental, he was equally a traditionalist who ‘held fast to the original vision of the Papunya Tula painters of communicating to the world the custodianship of the Western Desert people over their Dreaming narratives and places’ (18). He was fastidious about traditional knowledge. If other Indigenous painters’ artwork lacked ‘the food supplies of the ancestral beings’, for instance, he dismissed their works as ‘dead ones’ (198). Yet, Tjapaltjarri’s penchant for innovation and his independence manifest equally throughout his career. *Man’s Love Story* (1973) introduces ‘a non-traditional motif’ – a spindle hovering between a ‘brown haze of “atmosphere” and an “earth” made up of angular striped planes’ – which testifies to how he arrived at his ‘own set of secular symbols [...] to symbolise elements of the Ngarlu Love story’ (76). The spindle suggests a magnetic attraction between forbidden lovers, one that defies the guardians of a fiercely patrolled taboo, and irresistibly draws them ever closer, even though they know it cannot end well because their love is illicit.

This broaching of disparate worldviews derives from the effort to assert why Indigenous beliefs, traditions, and practices are important beyond their customary boundaries. In the process, Aboriginal art in the 1970s began to overturn hierarchical suppositions surrounding traditional and modernist cultures. For many of its champions, this was the enduring provocation of the Papunya Tula painting movement. The impressive works drove many contemporary artists to interact with Papunya Tula and other Indigenous artists, generating cross-cultural collaborations, such as Tim Johnson and Tjapaltjarri’s, and Michael Nelson Jagamara’s with the Camp Fire group.

As Aboriginal art slowly came to prominence in contemporary art, Central Australia began hosting visiting Australian and high-profile avant-gardists, such as Richard Long, Joseph Beuys, Ulay and Marina Abramović, Anslem Keifer, and even Joseph Kosuth, who all journeyed to contact the world's oldest continuous living culture. Unlike the South Pacific, the remote 'heart' of Australia had no history as an avant-garde destination until the 1970s. Following her participation in the 1979 Sydney Biennale, Abramović – together with Ulay (German artist Frank Uwe Laysiepen, her partner of 12 years) – spoke of a defining creative experience when spending a year living in the Australian outback:

I was in the desert with Ulay, but we lived with two different tribes. [...] I lived one year without money because we just lived on kangaroos and rats and lizards and honey ants and you don't even want to know what I was eating! [...] I had these amazing out-of-body experiences. There were things I can't even explain rationally. The Aborigines are the only tribes that don't use any drugs at all but they have incredible power of perception, telepathy and so on. It starts with sitting around the fire with the women and we are not talking and they are talking to my head and oh my God, I am going crazy.

(Abramović, 15 November 2012)

By the 1970s the rhetoric of Abramović's account is already well worn, even in its hippie inflection – with its implicit condescension. It suggests that redrafting the cultural map of the world can only reinforce European projections of pre-eminence and cultural normativity. The 'exotic', the primitive, resides far from London, Paris, or Berlin. Rather than separating the primitive and the modern, we require a more provocative conception that can grasp how the two are intricately intertwined – that is, conjoined at the heart of modernist thinking as forces of attraction and taboo – just like the lovers represented by the weaving analogy of Tjapaltjarri's spindle.

TOWARDS A NEW CARTOGRAPHIC VISION

The surrealist map's real challenge was to transform our understanding of global cultural significance. It is a classically modernist strategy, aiming to provoke action within one's own world. It creates room for critical agency within European culture by showing how it can be envisaged differently and reshaped to yield alternative conceptualizations of its perspectives, routines, and customs. On this model, primitivism is a tool of counter-cultural ambition because it permits new forms of cultural imagination.

The ambition of stepping outside one's own culture to grasp another culture is often viewed as a conceit because it is a product of unequal exchange, or the result of Western utopianism that 'carried nothing less than colonialism in its underbelly', as Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado puts it (2013: 94). Conversely, Leszek Kolakowski argues that this ambition to grasp what is culturally foreign involves a genuine risk that is important to one's own culture's prospects. It amounts to assuming that it is 'possible from within a culture, which, through learning to question itself, has shown itself to be capable of the effort of understanding another' (Kolakowski 1997: 19). Because one may not possess any obviously equivalent practices, language, or forms for

comparison, the risk necessitates the effort to ‘break out of the closed confines of ethnocentricity’ (19). To embark on this challenge is pivotal, but it ‘presupposes an epistemological impossibility – to enter into the mind of the object of inquiry while maintaining the distance and objectivity of a scientist’ (19).

This train of inquiry reprises Sigmund Freud’s classic work on the primitive, *Totem and Taboo*, which observed ambivalence at the heart of taboo relations, being ‘composed of conflicting affectionate and hostile impulses’ (Freud 2001: 17). Freud noted that ‘*taboo* is a Polynesian word’, returning us to Freud’s influence on Len Lye and the centrality of Pacific sources for reimagining geo-political and cultural projections or inverted resonances (21). Such reconfigurations are key to the surrealist map of the world – while the South Pacific islands are not magnified to the degree of Alaska (which dwarfs South America), the South Pacific is at the map’s centre (albeit at the expense of Australia; New Zealand stays relatively intact).

For Freud,

taboo is a primeval prohibition forcibly imposed (by some authority) from outside, and directed against the most powerful longings to which human beings are subject [...] The magical power that is attributed to taboo is based on the capacity for arousing temptation.

(2001: 40–1)

Freud asserts that in conjoining the sacred and the impure, taboo reduces them to one, ‘if we suppose that in a primitive mind the awakening of the memory of a forbidden action is naturally linked with the awakening of an impulse to put that action into effect’ (40). Anneleen Masschelein notes that Freud’s exploration of oscillating or conflicting projections of attraction and repulsion, concerning the internal and external, should be considered ‘*one* dual response’ (2011: 28). This perspective offers insight into the critical ambition of art in the context of primitivist projections.

This ambivalence illustrates how the uncanny oscillation of attraction and repulsion is at the heart of the modern ambition, and how the modern and the primitive are intricately related. Primitivism revives the idea of art as magically able to escape its society. It reinvigorates the classic modernist strategy, that seeks to show how art can reconceive the world with an aesthetic transformation that amplifies and seeks to transcend its culture’s limitations, while permitting the ‘return of the repressed in a safe way’ (Masschelein 2011: 31). This redrafting’s uncanny aspect is its introduction of ‘a sense of imperfection and human frailty’ into the mix (158). The enduring fascination with the primitive therefore involves a double risk: it tries for ‘an epistemological impossibility’ of renouncing one’s cultural specificity to question its parameters by way of another culture; and it lacks the solace of a politically correct distance from the foreign. It involves risks, but also the conceit of power and superiority, soliciting accusations of elitism, cultural chauvinism, dogmatism, and even bigotry.

Such fraught aspirations help explain the peculiar, fluctuating position of Australia and Oceania as it has shifted between oblivion and centre stage according to the vagaries of modernism’s projections of the primitive. In 1965, the surrealist ‘leader’ André Breton reinstated Australia on the world cultural map in his Preface for the English edition of Karel Kupka’s *Dawn of Art: Painting and Sculpture of Australian*

Aborigines (Un Art à l'état brut). According to Breton, Australia 'has a poetic magnetism all of its own', due to the instructive example of Australian Aboriginal art (Breton 2006: 723). Because its artistic vision is not influenced by Western ways of seeing, it starkly contrasts the plight of the Occident. Breton refers to 'primitives' – 'beings governed by affective forces more elementary than our own' – that affect the 'moderns', who feel a sense of 'lost powers' in a 'lost world' (723). Breton's revision of Australia's place on the world cultural map inevitably reverts to the key motives behind the appeal to primitivism: a projected lost pre-modern totality that can sharpen the critique of present circumstances. Breton does this, however, in wholly new circumstances. Ever 'since the sixth day of August 1945', he continues, the moderns confront a future in the shadow of nuclear weapons – and thus face the horror of witnessing a 'world in dissolution' (723). The pretence of separating the savage and the civilized was no longer feasible when technological sophistication now encompassed the utmost savagery. For Breton, Aboriginal art counteracts this dissolving world; though we are surrounded by alienation, it can help us resist (724). Aboriginal expression, for Breton, is 'disdainfully independent of *perceptual* representation', and is thus infallible 'on the plastic level' (724). The analysis was prescient: the artists who followed transformed the mission of abstraction. Thereafter, it would be difficult to tell if this late modernist path mined the 'primitive' for modernism, as Preston advocated, or if modernist abstract art only belatedly attained the formal eloquence of South Pacific and Australian Aboriginal art.

As we begin to approach its centenary, the surrealist map approaches an ironic realization as contemporary art goes global: no longer exclusively European, or even Western. While primitivism has disturbed familiar aesthetic-cultural orderings, such disturbances tend to be minimized by the current institutional discourse, which treats everything in terms of an asinine celebration of diversity. Eschewing careful avoidance of any negative racial or cultural connotation, many artists are once again drawn to primitivism precisely because it retains the potential to disturb and dismantle pretentiousness. The uncannily primitive persists at the heart of contemporary culture, illuminating and reinventing the resources of its critical attractions, and providing a way to address our unease at its less-than-savoury social outcomes. So the saga continues, complicating itself, while never eluding the duality of the primitivist-modernist dynamic in the contemporary situation's renewed circumstances.

NOTE

1. For translations of Strehlow and Tzara, see Stephen, McNamara and Goad (eds): 31–6.

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PART V
EUROPE



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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

‘A RARE MOMENT OF CRISIS’ Modernist intellectual currents in Europe



Irene Gammel and Cathy Waszczuk

We are living in a very singular moment of history. It is a moment of crisis, in the literal sense of that word. In every branch of our spiritual and material civilization we seem to have arrived at a critical turning-point. This spirit shows itself not only in the actual state of public affairs but also in the general attitude towards fundamental values in personal and social life.

(Planck 1932: 64)

German physicist Max Planck's sense of crisis, as expressed in his 1932 book *Where is Science Going?*, echoes William Butler Yeats's famous lines from 'The Second Coming,' written in 1919 (Haughey 2002: 161) and published in 1920: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' (466). German feminist and radical socialist Rosa Luxemburg articulated this experience of crisis as the preexisting condition for political revolution, demanding action and progress and rejecting the status quo. In a 1904 letter to a friend she insists: 'for a revolutionary movement not to go forward means – to fall back. The only means of fighting opportunism in a radical way is to keep going forward' (Luxemburg 2011: 183). 'Red Rosa', as Luxemburg was known, was a fierce proponent of revolutionary activity in Europe; her brazen state-sanctioned murder in 1919 by a group of paramilitary men shook Weimar Germany's fragile democracy. These three instances show how varied and widespread the intellectual and cultural responses to the modernist groundswell were, spread across the fields of science, politics, economics, and the arts, giving rise to the formation of diverse modern identities.

With the Second Boer War and two World Wars punctuating the period of European modernism examined in this article, the era encapsulates an unparalleled sense of bouleversement and sweeping change rendered even more turbulent by the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Spanish Civil War (1936–9). The Second Boer War (1899–1902) indicated the first faltering steps of an era of rapid industrialization, preceded by the Berlin Conference (1884–5), which focused on the colonial distribution of Africa and spoke to Europe's atavistic exploitation of the world. But

it was the First World War (1914–18), also known as the Great War or ‘the war to end all wars’, which marked the fundamental untenability of the old sociopolitical models. Triggered by the assassination of Austria’s Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo, Bosnia, the war’s unprecedented scale involved virtually every European nation in the hostilities. For the first time in recorded history, military belligerence and aggression involved mass-manufactured killing machines and chemical warfare.

Against this cataclysmic backdrop, European modernism offers a remarkable level of philosophical, intellectual, ideological, scientific, technological, political, and aesthetic development. Distinct from the values, mores, and relative peace of the Victorian era, the pace and intensification of radical thought and action during the modernist years provided the breeding ground for the proliferation of new dissenting -isms, schools, movements, and coteries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Amongst numerous other debates, the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of Europe was shaped by a wide spectrum of ideas ranging from socialism to Keynesian macroeconomics; suffragism, subjectivity and fashion; psychoanalysis and formalism; urbanism and primitivism; quantum theory and science; Nietzschean vitalism and the avant-garde; and communism, fascism, and National Socialism.

ECONOMIC CRISES AND MODERN ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Austrian filmmaker Fritz Lang’s 1927 silent film *Metropolis* offers a striking cinematic depiction of the treacherous monotony of the modern labourer in the throes of alienation, estranged from nature, self, and society by means of modern industry, technology, and politics. As traditional ideologies like religion ebbed, new political and economic allegiances (liberal, reactionary; capitalist, Marxist) gained traction. The first few decades of the twentieth century saw the marked increase in the number and frequency of economic transactions made between individuals, resulting from more wage-earners being employed. Labour agitation won important improvements for workers, such as fair wages and legal regulations on the number of hours one could work. In turn, these developments increased the availability and circulation of capital. The surge in expenditure and consumption was proudly displayed through colossal public spectacles celebrating the triumph of commodity culture in the World Expositions of London (1851), Paris (1889, 1900), and Chicago (1893, 1933). The expositions, which Walter Benjamin called ‘places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish’ (Benjamin 2002: 7), featured dizzying achievements in architecture and industry, allowing visitors to enjoy escapist fantasies by trying out the latest consumer goods or visiting mock ethnographic villages, trenchant examples of colonial exoticism.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels expounded on the nature of the commodity and commodity fetishism in revolutionary terms that would be adapted by the theorists and activists of the modernist era. ‘A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism’, Marx and Engels wrote presciently in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848 (Marx and Engels 1986: 33); by 1917, the Russian Revolution not only dealt the death blow to Russia’s monarchy (quite literally by executing the Romanov family) but ushered in the Communist system with the October Revolution.

Led by Vladimir Lenin, the ‘red’ Bolsheviks defeated the ‘white’ Mensheviks (monarchist and liberal forces). Adapting orthodox Marxism, Marxism-Leninism proclaimed ostensibly anti-capitalist concepts of communal ownership of lands in the newly minted Soviet Republic (USSR). The revolutionary state first encouraged, then brutally repressed, anarchist avant-gardists such as the constructivists Aleksandr Rodchenko and Aleksei Gan, and the suprematist Kazimir Malevich.

Numerous theorists and philosophers during the modernist era expanded and critiqued Marxist positions, perhaps most notably the Frankfurt School (Institut für Sozialforschung, Frankfurt Institute for Social Research) theorists, such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. Adorno and Horkheimer, for example, used Marx’s insights to analyze the context and arrangements of social systems to identify their latent flaws, internal contradictions, and subterranean structures through what is now commonly known as critical theory. In ‘The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception’ (1944; Adorno and Horkheimer 2002), they denounce the mindless production and repetitive consumption of manufactured ‘cultural’ entertainment and media, detecting within it the tailspin of the rational ideals that had fuelled European development since the Enlightenment.

In contrast to the Frankfurt School’s neo-Marxist critical methods, British economist and founder of modern macroeconomics John Maynard Keynes sought to address the problems of modern market economy through concrete interventions in the system. Prompted by the Great Depression (originating in 1929 in New York and spreading to Europe with soaring unemployment that crippled the Weimar Republic and facilitated the spread of Nazi ideology), Keynes argued for public investment, with government interventions ending both austerity measures and the *laissez faire* free market economy. Keynes’ modern macroeconomy was a rejection of both the unbridled capitalism that accompanied Victorian industrialism, and the Victorian belief that capitalist excesses could be regulated through acts of charity by the captains of industry.

GENDER AND MODERN RADICAL POLITICS

European intellectual currents also facilitated important economic and political advancements for women. The first wave of feminism, lasting roughly halfway through the 1800s and into the 1900s, coincides with the turn-of-the-century ‘New Woman’ who ardently challenged conventional attitudes towards sex, gender, and social propriety. Women enjoyed proliferating opportunities for self-expression through consumption, dress, and politics. Major reforms, such as increased access to education, the elimination of restrictions imposed upon women in the workforce, recognition of women’s personhood before the law, access to divorce, and moderate progress in sexual and reproductive rights appeared as a motley patchwork across Europe.

Limited women’s suffrage was achieved in Britain in 1918 and extended in 1928. The British suffrage movement, with iconic leaders Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia, consisted of numerous groups and affiliates such as the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). These two groups also exemplified the split between

suffragists and more radical suffragettes who deployed violent and self-destructive means to demand the voting franchise. Suffragettes scandalously smashed windows and slashed paintings, the most public instance being Mary Richardson's assault on Diego Velázquez's *The Toilet of Venus* in 1914.

Marxist feminist Alexandra Kollontai was the Commissar of Social Welfare after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and introduced sweeping reforms offering unprecedented recognition of and support for women's reproductive labours (pregnancy and child-rearing). By overthrowing conventional sexual mores through discrediting marriage and granting access to divorce and abortion, Kollontai aimed to bring more women into the productive economy. In Germany, the cause of women was also very closely aligned with socialism, at the head of which were Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, co-founders of the Spartacist League with Karl Liebknecht and other German Marxist revolutionaries. Fanning the flames of a radical socialist movement in Weimar Germany, they furthered the cause of women alongside the cause of the labouring classes, ultimately winning the vote for women in 1918.

Women were unable to vote in France until 1944. However, modernist Paris, with its comparatively relaxed social mores, bohemian enclaves, and influxes of expatriates (including numerous American modernists), offered women artists, writers, and luminaries previously verboten opportunities for the expression of sexual and artistic identities prior to extending suffrage to them. The City of Lights was also an important centre for modernist design, where French designer Coco Chanel, praised for her use of angular modernist lines, and her Italian rival Elsa Schiaparelli, with her Surrealist-inspired garments, set up their practices. Whether in the salons or amongst the couturiers, women's self-fashioning was emblematic of modernity's transient change. Clothing not only covers but also exhibits the body, as British psychoanalyst and dress reformer John Flugel theorized in *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930; Flugel 1950: 21–2). The new designs allowed women to construct new and modern public identities.

CRISIS OF PSYCHE, LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

The psychoanalytic revolution propelled the power of the unconscious and irrational drives (*Trieb*) into the vocabulary of modernist art and thought, revising the understanding of human personality. Whereas the Victorians relegated sex to the illicit underground, Austrian psychoanalyst and physician Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality* (1905; Freud 1962) posited the centrality of sex in human development, which occurs in psycho-sexual phases: oral, anal, and genital. Freud's model of development emphasized the tension in human make-up (id, ego, superego), as well as the force of dual drives of sex and aggression in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; Freud 1922). The clinical practice of psychoanalysis made use of the 'talking cure' (developed by fellow Austrian Joseph Breuer in the case of Anna O.). As Freud argued in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900; Freud 1913), the unconscious enters discourse through dreams, fantasies, and free associations – concepts that would become influential for Paris surrealists (such as Louis Aragon, André Breton, and Georges Bataille) as well as modernist writers and artists (from Dorothy Richardson to Salvador Dalí), and some of which had been anticipated by

the profoundly modern split and double-personalities in the fiction of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Robert Louis Stevenson. Neo-Freudians such as British object-relations psychoanalyst Melanie Klein extended Freudian concepts far beyond the modernist era, while fellow Viennese language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein critically pointed to its limits, redirecting attention to word meaning generated through use and context. In contrast to Freud, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget proposed a cognitive model of development that places the agency on the child and downplays the parental relationship, while a slew of experimental psychologists in the wake of German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (who launched the first psychological laboratory at Universität Leipzig in 1879) used empirical methods and pioneered experimental psychology as we know it today.

In much of Communist Eastern Europe, psychoanalysis was banned during the modernist era. The state-sanctified doctrine of materialism facilitated the rise of Russian formalism, which advocated analysis of language and literature with a focus on form rather than the biography or social context of the author. Major proponents included Roman Jakobson, founder of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1914; Boris Eichenbaum, founder of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language in 1916; and Viktor Shklovsky, whose concept of de-familiarization (*ostraneniye*) signalled the ostensible distinction between literary and everyday language; as well as Vladimir Propp. Their influence on structuralism, and on Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in particular, was enormous, leading to the 'linguistic turn' in literature and the social sciences by mid-century. The French neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan would ultimately conjoin psychoanalysis and structuralism.

Modernist-era philosophers and scientists also turned their attention to theories of society and social cohesion. Influenced by positivism, French sociologist Émile Durkheim was interested in the consciousness of both individuals and societies (the *conscience collective*, or collective consciousness). In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) he differentiates between societies with 'mechanical solidarity' (little division of labour resulting in a recognition of similarity or kindred-ness) and 'organic solidarity' (highly differentiated labour in industrialized societies that fosters interdependence with fellow labourers) (1997: 85 *passim*). Durkheim believed that society benefits from cultivating individualism through mutual interdependence, and he developed the theory of anomie to describe when individuals remained unintegrated with their peers during cultural and historical upheaval, as theorized in his landmark book *Suicide* (1897; Durkheim 1951).

In contrast, anti-positivist German sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey considered human action to be understood experientially (*Verstehen*, understanding) through the mind and body, rather than by explanation through cause and effect (*Erklärung*, explanation). This was the principle difference in the functioning of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) from the positivistic accounts of natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). German sociologist Max Weber modified these distinctions through his interpretive methodology. In his most famous text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905; Weber 1930), Weber postulates that through gradual secularization, the asceticism of Protestantism gave way to the work ethic that dominates the 'spirit of capitalism', which 'determines the lives of all individuals who are born into this mechanism' (1930: 181). He continues: 'The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so' (181–2).

The relationship between the individual psyche and the community gains additional drama and poignancy in the rapidly expanding metropolis, the icon of modernity for many theorists and artists. Having grown up in Berlin, German sociologist Georg Simmel knew firsthand of the city's ability to produce modern subjectivities, but also knew of the disorienting affect that capitalism held for individuals in the urban environment, which he discusses in 'The metropolis and mental life' (1903). Focusing on the city's atomizing effects on the individual psyche, Simmel theorized the city's excessive stimuli brought to bear on city dwellers who protect themselves with the armour of *blasé* attitudes (Simmel 1971). In contrast, Berlin architect and theorist August Endell embraced the supposed ugliness and chaos of the big city, asking city dwellers to immerse themselves in the transitory beauty of quotidian city existence. These concepts of urban modernity influenced the modernist thinkers and artists of the next generation, including Benjamin, Le Corbusier, Franz Hessel (*Heimliches Berlin*), and Wassily Kandinsky. In *The Arcades Project* (originally *Das Passagen-Werk*, 1940), an influential though fragmentary work of cultural criticism, Benjamin delves into Paris as the world city of the nineteenth century. Benjamin describes the *flâneur* or city stroller, immersed in the theatre of material ephemera – advertisement, fashion, prostitution – who observes city life from a distance, a concept of dandyism and modernity first introduced by Charles Baudelaire (2002: 37).

Against the transient complexities of the modern metropolis was the opposite lure of 'the primitive', witnessed in the launching of the Musée de l'homme (1937) in Paris and other 'primitive art' collections in major European cities. Large-scale expeditions to the Trobriand Islands, undertaken by Polish-British anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, and the Dakar-Djibouti Mission of French ethnographers Michel Leiris and Marcel Griaule, promulgated new theories of human existence beyond Europe. French scholar Lucien Lévy-Bruhl investigated 'primitive' societies in *How Natives Think* (1910; Lévy-Bruhl 1926), exploring, in particular, the importance of ritual, mysticism, and mythology to the social makeup of the community. Lévy-Bruhl's work reverberated through the arts in analyses of so-called 'primitive' elements in art and design, hearkening also to Wilhelm Worringer's theories regarding the difference between 'empathetic' and 'abstract' art and the cultures that produced them in *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1907; Worringer 1997). Of course, primitivism was (and remains) a controversial concept, criticized by ethnologists and anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss, nephew of Durkheim. Mauss's enduring *The Gift* (1925; Mauss 1966) theorized indigenous rituals of gift-giving, positing that these rituals reflect reciprocal rather than monetary exchange economies, presenting a compelling alternative to capitalism that inexorably leads towards alienation, or anomie, and cultural crisis.

Against the relentless pursuits of mechanization and science flowed the counter-currents of vitalism and occultism. With its focus on life-affirming Dionysian energy, Nietzschean vitalism influenced the literary and artistic avant-gardes throughout Europe, such as the turn-of-the-century George-Kreis, a coterie that developed around German poet Stefan George to embrace pagan and gender-bending erotics. French philosopher Henri Bergson's text *Creative Evolution* (1907; Bergson 1911), and his notion of *élan vital*, had enormous influence on the European avant-garde and on European theorists beyond the modernist era, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the 1970s. Bergson's opposition between intuitively lived time (*la*

durée) and mechanical clock time (*le temps*) was immensely influential. With the decline of traditional religious beliefs (in the wake of Darwin), occult experimentation in spiritualism flourished, tapping experiences beyond the domain of reason with neo-pagan thought and practice as well as with theosophical revivals and magical societies. Occultism, spiritualism, and biomorphism presented a critical reaction to the all-encompassing triumphs of technology and science.

REVOLUTIONS IN TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE

A proliferation of new technologies evolved alongside European modernism: the motor vehicle, powered by the newly discovered internal combustion engine, itself powered by oil and petroleum (and before that the railway car, propelled by steam); electricity, which began to circulate for the first time; the first telephone, whose ring announced the noisy near-future of the telecommunication age; and mechanized recording technologies, which produced analogue material copies of pictures and words written, spoken, or sung. These innovations, along with cinema, photography, and x-ray, decisively altered the modern experience, inaugurating profound shifts in perceptual abilities and providing new ways to see, hear, and think. The theoretical advancements in science and atomic and subatomic physics, especially the unpredictability of quantum theory, were profoundly disruptive to physical existence as it had been understood thus far.

Immediately before the turn of the century, British physicist J.J. Thomson first suggested that the atom was composed of smaller particles known as electrons. Several years later, Thomson's observations were modified by British nuclear physicist Ernest Rutherford, who hypothesized that the structure of the atom consisted of electrons circling a positively charged nucleus, as planets orbit the sun. Quantum theory introduced a new paradigm of physical existence that did not cohere with the dominant worldview. Max Planck proposed that light, rather than moving in waves, as previously thought, emitted quanta, or infinitesimally small individual measures of energy. This was further revised by Danish physicist Niels Bohr and German Werner Heisenberg, who investigated the mechanics of subatomic particles, and concluded that such particles need not behave according to classical physics. And, in another blow to the Newtonian model of the universe, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (*Unschärfeprinzip*, literally the principle of lack of sharpness) suggested that physical phenomena are not properly subject to the definite, material, and empirically observable principles that had dominated investigation in the natural sciences. Rather, the behaviour of atoms and subatomic particles, the very building blocks of physical life, can be observed and known, but never with absolute certainty.

German physicist Albert Einstein also famously revolutionized Newtonian physics by developing a macro-model of four-dimensional space-time, which he detailed in his special (1905) and general (1916) relativity theories. Einstein's groundbreaking discoveries transformed configurations of the known universe and the perception of the 'real' far beyond the realm of science. The destabilization of time and experience and the destruction of theories of matter were responded to by the increasing fragmentation deployed within literature and the arts. T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and, notably, Wyndham Lewis, considered Einstein's work an affront to logic, reason, and objectivity. On the other hand, modernist and avant-garde art also frequently

drew upon the very destabilization of time, and the fragmentation, deconstruction, extension, and compression of matter and experience that these revolutions in physics brought into the cultural consciousness. In literature, British poet Mina Loy composed a panegyric to Gertrude Stein, who, like ‘Curie/of the laboratory’, ‘crushed/the tonnage/of consciousness’, making manifest the infinitely small but infinitely dense ‘radium of the word’, invoking the language of radioactivity and science to discuss Stein’s experimentation with language (Loy 1996: 94). Visually, the syntactic and poetic reconstitution of language, a dispersal of the basic atomic units of written language – words, letters, syllables, and strokes – would explode across the page in dadaist typographical flurry. And the modernist sense of crisis reverberated back through society to the physicists. Physics, ontology, and philosophy all coalesced, forcing a very radical destabilization of matter, being, and knowing across the arts.

CRISIS OF INTELLECTUALISM

Amongst the most malignant facets of the European modernist era was the pervasive mistrust and scapegoating of Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whereas anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic attitudes predate the modernist era, the chilling, systematic attempted annihilation of the European Jewish population under Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich stands as witness to the latent barbarism of modernity and marks the end of European modernism.

The establishment of formal principles of anti-Semitic thought brought together key intellectual currents of the period. The growth of commercial banking, one of few industries in which Jews were allowed to prosper (due to religious restrictions against Christians loaning money for interest), caused the historic condemnation of Jews as usurers. The achievements of middle-class Jews as merchants, business owners, lawyers, doctors, and intellectuals, and the increasing rates at which Jews were attending universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in a backlash that charged Jews with a clannish usurpation of political power and economic interest. This was exacerbated by the historical self-administration of Jewish populations in urban ‘ghettos’ or enclaves in which Jewish families clustered by choice or by forced segregation. Lastly, the credence given to ethnographic and scientific thought at the beginning of the century held theories of race in tension with theories of identity and nationhood, characterizing European Jews as the threatening, at-home Other that plagued the normative Western self. This misappropriation of Darwinian evolutionary theory was the eugenic complement to Hitler’s Aryanism during the Second World War.

Nazi ideology emerged within the rising tide of ultra-right wing politics throughout Europe, with a mythologized backwards view of history and a fiercely biological theory of race. Benito Mussolini, like Hitler, was a master of rhetoric. The militaristic bravado of Mussolini – also known as *Il Duce* (‘The Leader’) – seemed to arrive on the wings of Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni’s manifestos and Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce’s (early) fascist sympathies. Mussolini was an ally to Spanish dictator Francisco Franco’s Nationalist faction during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) and Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The international scope of the Spanish Civil War effectively prefaced the catastrophic events of the Second World War, with Germany and Italy supporting

Franco’s authoritarian Nationalist regime while the Soviet Union supported the anarchist and unionist Republicans.

While anti-Semitism was certainly alive within the modernist arena in Europe, as seen in the examples of poet T.S. Eliot and vorticist Wyndham Lewis, the ultimate crisis that marked the brutal end of European intellectual currents in modernism coincides with the arrival of the Nazis to power. The Nazis’ first measures included a violent suppression of modern art as *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art). The books of numerous anarchists, communists, Jews, and pacifists were publicly burnt as ‘undeutsch’ (Un-German), among them figures as diverse as German expressionist playwright Georg Kaiser, Polish-German socialist Rosa Luxemburg, Czech-Austrian writer Franz Kafka, and popular German children’s fiction writer Erich Kästner. Meanwhile, the new proponents of ‘Aryan physics’ attacked Einstein and Planck (Planck’s son was executed by the Nazis for his role in plotting Hitler’s assassination in July 1945). Modernist art and thought was censored and replaced by the bombastic and propagandistic realism of Nazi architecture, film, and art. Women were relegated to the pre-modern realms of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church). Forced into exile, numerous Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals including Einstein and the members of the Frankfurt School, as well as artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Kandinsky, and Thomas Mann, emigrated to the United States, the dramatic exodus of modernist talent also shifting the focus of European intellectual thought from Europe to America.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN EUROPE

—♦—
Michael Johnson

From the urban skyline to the domestic interior, modernism in Europe presented a utopian vision of how the built environment could be transformed, raising living standards for the masses and elevating human consciousness to a higher intellectual and moral plane. The period from the French Revolution to the First World War was a time of disorientating upheaval. The rise of industry disrupted seemingly eternal patterns of human existence. Within the parameters of modernism, many creative disciplines sought to represent the disorientation and alienation arising from this state of flux. In architecture and design, however, the singular objective was to fashion order from the chaos. This essay examines the development of modernist architecture and design in Europe by identifying its key principles and charting its chronological and geographical variations.

The shock of the new world of the Industrial Revolution inspired some theorists to demand a return to pre-industrial existence. For example, the British Arts and Crafts Movement (c.1880–1914) evolved out of the Gothic Revival and the teachings of Victorian art critic John Ruskin. Appalled by the effects of industrialisation and the division of labour inherent in the factory system, adherents mythologized the medieval past and sought to revive traditional craftsmanship even as they formulated principles of good ‘modern’ design, such as fitness for purpose and the correct use of materials (Morris 1996 [1893]).

Some architects and designers adapted these ideas about modern design in their search for order, rationality, and purity of form to embrace – not reject – the ‘new’ as well as modernization. Although modernism in this context was a loose coalition that gave purpose to the concepts and techniques developed by a diverse web of influences, a number of core principles unite the various national schools. In the introduction to his own edited volume *Modernism in Design* (1990), Paul Greenhalgh identifies 12 principles, of which several deserve particular consideration.

ANTI-HISTORICISM

The preoccupation with modernity meant that overt reference to the architectural styles of the past was deemed invalid. Architecture must be of its time and adapted to

the needs of modern life. In practical terms, this meant utilizing modern materials and construction methods. Historicist styles were rejected, although the mathematical harmonies of Greek classicism and the structural innovations of medieval Gothic architecture continued to exert an influence on some practitioners. For example, Bruno Taut designed a Glass Pavilion for the Cologne Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition (1914), in which the prismatic qualities of the Gothic cathedral were extrapolated and reproduced as a crystalline structure of concrete and coloured glass.

FUNCTIONALISM

Modernists believed that the function of buildings and design objects was of primary importance. It was therefore vital to eliminate all features that might impede function, particularly decoration. This gave rise to an aesthetic that was austere and spartan: minimalist form became a visual metaphor for functionalism. This equation proved to be problematic, however, not least because the modernist conception of function was narrowly defined and reductive. In his design for the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois (1945) Ludwig Mies van der Rohe pursued his search for pure minimalism to the extreme, but by reducing the walls to transparent glass screens created a house that was fundamentally flawed as a living space.

ABSTRACTION

Modernist architecture and design centrally relied on abstraction. Often, the formal vocabulary was reduced to cubic tectonics and pure white surfaces. This search for purity of form paralleled developments in cubism and other artistic movements within the avant-garde (Greenhalgh 1990). The abandonment of historicist styles and ornamentation arguably corresponded to fine art's rejection of modelling, perspective, and illusionistic space, and music's rejection of melody. This link is most evident in the work of the Dutch De Stijl movement, which extended Mondrian's orthogonal abstractions in painting to architecture, interior design, and furniture.

MACHINE AESTHETIC

The machine became a model for design and a source of visual motifs, particularly in the work of Russian constructivists. Many modernist architects and designers regarded the machine as the indisputable symbol of the age and were determined to formulate an aesthetic compatible with it. One such figure was architect Adolf Loos, whose 'Ornament and Crime' (1908) argued that applying ornament to a designed product was tantamount to a criminal act because it exploited the craftsman: 'If I pay as much for a smooth box as for a decorated one, the difference in labour belongs to the worker' (Loos 1908 quoted in Whitford 1984: 20).

For evidence of mechanical exactitude, modernists looked to the United States, where an unselfconscious functionalism had been put into practice by Henry Ford, who brought the concept of standardization to his car plant with near-miraculous results. His moving assembly line, which involved specialized stages of fabrication, increased car production dramatically. Architects applied mass production techniques

by embracing standardization and prefabrication to construct buildings cheaply and efficiently, enabling modernism's dissemination around the world.

TOTAL WORK OF ART

A key aspect of modernism was the Wagnerian concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art'. Architecture, design and art were to be treated as a continuum, either as the result of a single coordinating vision or of communal work. Modernist buildings brought a range of creative disciplines into symphonic unity. In Josef Hoffmann's Purkersdorf Sanatorium (1904–5), for example, architecture, interior design, and furniture were synthesized by a strict aesthetic programme based on the reiteration of square and cubic forms. The insistence on the equivalence of artistic disciplines collapsed the academic hierarchies between 'fine art' and the 'decorative arts', a process initiated by the Arts and Crafts Movement and extended by groups including the Vienna Secession, the Deutscher Werkbund, and the Bauhaus.

SPATIALITY

Modernism entailed a new conception of architecture as the art of spatial enclosure. Emphasis was placed on volume rather than mass, and walls were reduced to membranes defining space. This further invalidated the styles of the past and the use of ornament. A number of modernist interiors are remarkable for their flowing or interpenetrating spaces, particularly the houses of Adolf Loos.

INTERNATIONALISM

Emerging from the cataclysm of the First World War, modernism was internationalist. Nationalism appeared an irrational and retrograde impulse that had led to the chaos of war. Some believed that a universal language of design could facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Geometric abstraction was favoured because it represented a transcendent language of immutable forms. This was accompanied by a resurgence of interest in Platonic theory, which held that geometric forms were elements of the world of ideal form that existed beyond material reality. The internationalist spirit also produced groups such as the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), which facilitated dialogue between the various national centres of modernism.

The degree of commitment to these principles varied from group to group, but altogether they created an aesthetic that was remarkably unified. Modernist architecture is easily caricatured as a puritanical aesthetic of white walls and flat roofs, since the formal vocabulary was more consistent than expressions of modernism in the fine arts. Nonetheless, modernist design was not monolithic; several distinct national schools existed and followed separate chronologies.

One of the first expressions of modernism was Italian futurism, founded by avant-garde writers and artists in 1909. Futurists believed that the modern world required a uniquely modern architecture and recognized that the primary arena of modernity was the metropolis. In the manifesto of Futurist architecture (1914), the young architect Antonio Sant'Elia writes: 'We must invent and rebuild our Futurist city like

an immense and tumultuous shipyard, active, mobile, and everywhere dynamic, and the Futurist house like a gigantic machine.’ (Sant’Elia 1914, reprinted in Rainey *et al.* 2009: 200). Sant’Elia visualized these ambitions in a series of drawings entitled *La Città Nuova* (*The New City*, 1914). His futuristic structures constitute a vast, technological metropolis. Surmounted by industrial chimneys and radio masts, Sant’Elia’s buildings promote a machinic iconography. Buildings are penetrated by tramlines and roads: mass transit systems signifying a wholesale transformation of the built environment. However, Sant’Elia’s vision far exceeded the contemporary technological capabilities, and his designs remained speculative.

More pragmatic designers did not celebrate the vortex of modernity for its own sake. Instead, they aimed to harness its power to achieve a new stability through commitment to formal purity. This aspect was principally developed by the De Stijl movement. In 1917, artist and critic Theo Van Doesberg launched the avant-garde journal *De Stijl* (*The Style*). The title came to be used for the movement itself, a group of artists, designers, and theorists cut off from the rest of Europe by the First World War.

Pursuing spiritual harmony through mathematical order, the group developed an abstract style based upon primary colours, geometric planes, and orthogonal grids. Inspired by Platonic philosophy and Theosophical occultism, the painter Piet Mondrian produced a series of paintings that reiterated these basic elements. The designer Gerrit Rietveld translated Mondrian’s experiments into three-dimensional design objects and spaces. His experimental Red-Blue Chair, designed in 1917, but repainted in De Stijl’s signature colours, is essentially a three-dimensional version of a Mondrian painting. The intersection of planes and lines emphasizes rather than impedes the surrounding space, and the ends of each strut are painted yellow to suggest vectors shooting off into infinity.

De Stijl produced relatively few buildings, but there are some notable examples. Rietveld’s major architectural commission was a private house for Mrs Truus Schröder-Schräder. Built in a suburban area of Utrecht, the Schröder House (1924) further extrapolated Mondrian’s formal elements into an all-encompassing environment. The façade was fractured into a series of planes and lines, which seem suspended in space. Colour articulates the rhythm of the façades. The emphasis on free-floating planes establishes a powerful unity between interior and exterior, and the rooms are divided by sliding partitions, allowing the owner to reconfigure the space.

Van Doesburg’s interiors for the Café de l’Aubette in Strasbourg (1926–8) consist of rectangular panes of colour held in balance by the architectural framework. By rotating De Stijl’s chromatic grids by 45 degrees Van Doesburg created a play of diagonal lines that disrupted Mondrian’s strict orthogonal grammar. The architect J.J.P. Oud was aligned with De Stijl in his early career, but gravitated to a more socially conscious mode of practice, designing workers’ housing at the Spangen and Tussendijken housing estates in Rotterdam (1918–20). De Stijl evaporated after Van Doesburg’s death in 1931, but was profoundly influential.

Contemporary with these innovations, avant-garde designers in Russia responded to the 1917 Revolution. Russia was still essentially a rural, peasant country possessing little heavy industry, and technology seemed capable of transforming the world; machines were ideal metaphors for revolution and progress. Constructivism, so

named because its members saw it as their task to construct the environment for a new society, put itself in the service of the proletarian utopia promised by the Revolution. The artist Vladimir Tatlin believed architecture was linked to engineering rather than art, as his 'Monument to the Third International' (1919–20) suggests. This projection for a 400m tall tower (only a scale model was built) unites art and construction: its sculptural form of two intertwining spirals and a soaring diagonal component is rendered in a lattice construction suggestive of engineering. Resembling a machine, the tower also functioned as one, with four transparent volumes that rotated at different speeds. These were intended to house government offices for legislation, administration, information, and cinematic projection. A more tangible constructivist architecture was developed by the Vesnin brothers, as well as Konstantin Melnikov and Moisei Ginzburg.

The Soviet government soon recognized the propaganda function of constructivist design and established various agencies to cultivate it. Proletkult, or the Organization for Proletarian Culture, recruited avant-garde designers such as Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova to create graphic and textile designs exuding a rhythmic dynamism. Some of these were applied to the 'agitprop' trains that spread the revolutionary message to Russia's largely illiterate population.

A pioneer of German modernism was architect and designer Peter Behrens. In 1907, he was appointed head designer to AEG, Germany's leading manufacturer of electrical equipment. Behrens designed an entire scheme for the company – buildings, industrial products, and logos – earning recognition as one of the first industrial designers. His AEG Turbine Factory in Berlin (1910) was among the first expressions of architectural modernism. Its utilitarian aesthetic derives from exposed steel frames, poured concrete and glass panes. However, the building was not a complete break with the past. Behrens' work had a strong classicizing tendency and the Turbine Factory retains the monumental dignity of a Greek temple.

Behrens was also active as a teacher whose students included such future modernist luminaries as Walter Gropius, Adolph Meyer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. Gropius and Meyer founded their own architectural practice and continued the reductive programme initiated by Behrens. An early triumph was the Fagus Factory in Alfeld on the Leine (1911–13). The architectural language of the Fagus Factory is rectilinear, based on alternating brick and glass, but it displays a thrilling structural virtuosity: the steel frame allowed the windows to run around the corners without any structural support, setting the scene for later experiments with prismatic architecture.

The epicentre of German modernism was the Bauhaus, a radical academy of art and design that opened in 1919, having developed from an older institution. Gropius was appointed as the first principal and steered it through its turbulent early years. The Bauhaus is associated with a rationalist, scientific approach to design, but early on the training was craft-based, and the aesthetic tended towards expressionism.

Gropius elucidated this focus in a 1919 manifesto illustrated with a woodcut of a Gothic cathedral by the artist Lionel Feininger. The medium and subject matter suggest a mystical connection with the Middle Ages and the craft guilds that inspired the Arts and Crafts Movement, but the visual style is jagged and crystalline, suggesting contemporary expressionism. The influence of Arts and Crafts principles on the Bauhaus craft aesthetic is manifested in the Sommerfeld House by Gropius and

Meyer (1920–1). Standing on a stone plinth, the building has a wooden superstructure and decoration, albeit of an abstract nature. The use of wood demonstrates respect for tradition in craft processes and vernacular forms, while the structural frame remains visible, and the design relies on crystalline forms and rhythmic contrasts of line.

Gropius favoured machine standardization and industrialization, embracing prefabrication and formulaic rationalism. The curriculum at the Bauhaus was set out as a circular diagram (1922), the geometric presentation highlighting the inherent rationalism of the school. Training started with the six-month preliminary course (Vorlehre), followed by three years of materials-based workshop training. At the centre is ‘Bau’ or building: students were instructed in craftsmanship before progressing to the art that encompasses all others – architecture. However, the architecture course was not introduced until 1927. Theo Van Doesburg, the international ambassador of De Stijl, taught near the Bauhaus from 1922–3 and, although never fully accepted by Gropius, he encouraged Bauhaus designers to move away from their early expressionistic and craft-based aesthetic towards geometric simplicity.

In 1925, political tensions forced the Bauhaus to move from Weimar to the industrial city of Dessau, a transition that encouraged the shift towards rationalist modes of working. The new building complex, which included teaching blocks, student housing, and masters’ houses (1925–6), was designed by Gropius in a modern factory aesthetic [see Fig. 33.1]. The principal elevations are reduced to suspended glass screens, which illuminate the studios and make their internal functions transparent. Exemplifying the modernist fascination with mechanisms, multiple windows could be opened simultaneously with a single gear.



Figure 33.1 Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Complex at Dessau, Germany (1925–6).
imageBROKER/Alamy.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe succeeded Gropius and Hannes Meyer as director of the Bauhaus. The son of a stonemason, Mies' ideas about architecture were rooted in his early experiences of masonry and the crafting of materials. His work was influenced by neo-classicism and had a strong sense of classical proportion and form. The structural explorations of the French neo-Gothicist Viollet-le-Duc were also influential. Early on, Mies designed expressionist office towers, but his mature work was concerned with universal solutions, inspired by the neo-Platonic teachings of Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine.

In 1927 Mies organized and contributed to the Weissenhof Siedlung Exhibition, a model housing estate in Stuttgart. He also designed the German Pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition (1928–9), a model of 'reductionist' architecture, yet executed in luxurious marble and bronze. His Tugendhat House in Brno, Czech Republic (1928–30) was a vision of minimalist elegance, achieving an independence of walls and structure. Mies's work comprises an extreme rationalism, but this aspect of his work has been criticized because of its drastic simplification. His post-war work in the United States pursued the doctrine of minimalism to the absolute extreme.

Among the greatest exponents of modernism in any cultural field was the Swiss-born architect, designer, and painter Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier (an altered form of his mother's maiden name, Lecorbésier, and a pun meaning 'the crow like one'). Le Corbusier became the leading modernist architect. His reductionist programme was visualized in the *Maison Dom-ino* (1914), a template for mass-produced architecture consisting of three identical planes suspended above each other on steel columns. An external staircase communicates between each level, permitting spatial clarity within. The components were all to be standardized and pre-fabricated to allow rapid construction. The house thus manifest Le Corbusier's ambition to apply mass production principles to domestic architecture, though this ideal proved difficult to achieve.

In 1923, Le Corbusier published *Vers une architecture* (translated as *Towards a New Architecture*), to promote the architectural virtues of engineering. His infamous declaration, 'A house is a machine for living in' (Le Corbusier 1987 [1923]: 95), meant that architects' guiding principle should be to make the house as fit for purpose as a machine. The text was illustrated with photographs of grain silos and factories. Le Corbusier urged architects to emulate these stark, utilitarian structures rather than perpetuating historicist styles: 'Architecture has nothing to do with the various 'styles' [...] [they are] sometimes pretty, though not always; and never anything more' (Le Corbusier 1987: 37).

However, Le Corbusier was no iconoclast. He admired classical architecture and tried to achieve the same sense of spiritual harmony in his own work. The architectural theorist Sigfried Giedion summarized these impulses thus:

[Le Corbusier] always looked to the experiences of former times in his travels and he was usually interested in crystalline Greek forms and in the forms of Roman vaults or Islamic or Gothic architecture. His search for inner similarities had nothing to do with art history: it embraced the experience of the entire architectural development.

(1982 [1941]: 578)

Pursuing rationalism, Le Corbusier formulated his ‘Five Points of Architecture’ in 1926:

- 1 The pilotis elevating the mass off the ground;
- 2 The free plan, achieved through the separation of the load-bearing columns from the walls subdividing the space;
- 3 The free façade, the corollary of the free plan in the vertical plane;
- 4 The long horizontal sliding window;
- 5 The roof garden.

(Le Corbusier 1927)

These points were brilliantly elucidated in one of his most famous designs, the Villa Savoye (1929–31), outside Paris [Fig. 33.2]. The superstructure is raised from the ground on pilotis, as though elevated to a higher intellectual plane. The structure is clearly visible because the pilotis continue up through the interior and provide structural support. This allowed Le Corbusier to develop the free façade: the walls are non-load-bearing, permitting the use of continuous ribbon windows. The aesthetic is ruthlessly pristine, but the building has something of the classical pavilion about it. Modernist architecture has a reputation for being devoid of aesthetic pleasure, but Le Corbusier was capable of designing expressive sculptural forms, as exemplified by the wave-like stairwell and the roof terrace with its enveloping planes. Such buildings formed the ideal setting for Le Corbusier’s mechanistic furniture. His studio assistant, Charlotte Perriand, designed iconic chairs according to Le Corbusier’s brief, including the LC2 Grand Comfort and the B306 chaise longue (1928–30). Perriand was one of the few female designers to succeed in the patriarchal world of modernist design, but until comparatively recently her work was overshadowed by the myth of the male genius.



Figure 33.2 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye at Poissy, France (1929–32).
Bildarchiv Monheim GmbH/Alamy.

From the 1930s, Le Corbusier's forms became freer, reflecting the influence of surrealism and experiments with exposed concrete. Some of his late buildings explore the spiritual realm, as in his chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut at Ronchamp (1950–55), a composition of expressive organic forms that cannot be explained in terms of his earlier doctrines. The building embodies a powerful spirituality in its thick, irregular walls, stained glass, and silent internal spaces.

Much of Le Corbusier's work appears to be indifferent to its context, but he had an intangible way of relating his forms to nature. To elucidate the link between the human and the divine, he invented the 'Modulor', a system of design based on human dimensions. Controversially, Le Corbusier devised grandiose schemes of utopian master-planning, including the unexecuted Ville Radieuse or 'Radiant City' (1945) and the Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles (1946–52), a monolithic mass housing block consisting of a huge concrete frame into which apartment units were slotted. Aspects of social infrastructure were provided as part of the scheme, including an indoor market and a rooftop communal recreation area.

A second phase of architectural and design modernism began in 1932, when Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson organized the International Style exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, introducing European modernism to North America. When the Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, they launched a diaspora of modernist architects and designers throughout the world. Many Jewish architects fled to what would become Israel and created the white city of Tel Aviv; others went to Britain and the United States. Modernist architecture and design thus became global phenomena. The International Style perpetuated the formal vocabulary of the pioneer phase, but abandoned many of its theoretical tenets in order to produce buildings and objects that could be practically achieved. Lacking its former idealism, it became indifferent to context, producing monotonous and impersonal buildings that made no concession to local culture or climate.

Modernist architecture was introduced to Britain in the late 1920s, but was slow to penetrate the conservative design establishment. However, it was appreciated by a cultivated elite and made progress in the design of luxury flats and private houses. Wells Coates, a Canadian engineer and designer, was the major exponent in Britain, designing Lawn Road Flats in London (1933–4), the serene flagship of British modernism. This was built according to Bauhaus ideals of standardisation, down to the integrated furniture. Indeed, some of the first tenants were leading European modernists escaping from Nazi Germany, including Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and László Maholy-Nagy.

British modernism had less success in the field of public buildings, but an exception is Bexhill Pavilion in Sussex (1934) by Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff. Some institutions used modernism as the basis of progressive corporate identities: London Transport created new stations and advertising, and the British Broadcasting Corporation commissioned Coates to design a series of glacial studio interiors across the country. Following the Second World War, modernism was accepted out of necessity. Influenced by the late work of Le Corbusier, the Brutalist idiom became integral to Britain's post-war reconstruction, involving extensive use of exposed concrete and an exaggerated monumentality.

The genealogy of modernist design in Europe is complex. The Italian futurists were among the first to celebrate modernity for its own sake. The Dutch De Stijl

movement developed a new mode of expression based on pure form and colour. In Germany, the Bauhaus formulated an architecture that was supremely rational and adapted to the needs of modern industrial society. These disparate groups were aligned by the search for a universal human consciousness. The abstract, elemental aesthetic was conceived as a universal language that would transcend national and social boundaries. Built upon these shared principles, modernism became the prevailing design orthodoxy of twentieth-century Europe.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

ENVISIONING THE SCENE OF
THE MODERN

Modernism and European cinema

—♦—
Michael Valdez Moses

Since that December day in 1895, when paying customers seated in the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris watched ten short projected motion pictures made by Auguste and Louis Lumière, the histories of European cinema, modernism, and modernity have been intertwined. The first film on the programme, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*, and the more celebrated Lumière short released in 1896, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, depict scenes drawn from modern life: workers leaving the Lumière factory in Lyon and a train drawn by a steam locomotive arriving at the station in the coastal town of La Ciotat. In the decades that followed the public triumph of the Lumières in a small venue on the Boulevard des Capucines, the new medium of cinema not only represented modern life, it also helped shape it.

For early enthusiasts and critics of cinema, the new medium promised to bring a revolution in modern culture. The Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin, as well as the expatriate American poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), saw in cinema an alternative to – even a substitute for – pre-modern forms of the sacred (Benjamin 1969; H.D. 1927a, 1927b). For Benjamin, the movie theatre offered a place where a new revolutionary and egalitarian collectivity might be formed; for H.D. it had the potential to become a modern temple of light that would rival the pagan edifices of classical antiquity. If their dreams of a world revolutionized by the newest and most influential art form in history were not realized – at least in the manner they envisioned – both Benjamin and H.D. intuited in their different ways the profoundly dialectical relationship that was emerging between the new medium and modern culture.

While the early advocates of cinema often overestimated the revolutionary potential of the medium, ‘the seventh art’ – like the various modernisms more generally – not only portrayed, but also subtly altered our evolving modern sensibilities (Canudo 1923).¹ I argue that the artists and filmmakers who pioneered cinematic art in the silent and early sound eras contributed in important ways to an ongoing modernist revolution that reconceived and reimagined many of the fundamental categories of human experience: motion, space, and time. The new art form, while it did not fundamentally alter human nature or our existential relation to the world, nonetheless provided a new lens through which we moderns came to view our lives. By looking repeatedly through that lens, we began to comprehend our habits and

customs, our daily experiences and activities, indeed the world itself in a distinctively modern – even modernist – way.

Although the films seen by the audience in the Salon Indien du Grand Café on 28 December 1895 were shot with a stationary cinématographe (a device invented by Léon Bouly in 1892 and subsequently improved by the Lumières, that could record, develop, and project motion pictures), pioneering filmmakers such as Edwin S. Porter, D.W. Griffith, Giovanni Pastrone, Abel Gance, and Sergei Eisenstein soon liberated the camera from its fixed position.² To be sure, the early audiences of cinema, like their ancestors, had experienced and witnessed motion in their everyday lives long before they saw a motion picture. But it is no mere coincidence that the films of the Lumières, indeed of early cinema in general, prominently featured movement. Clearly there was little novelty (or commercial potential) to be found in motion pictures (or moving pictures as they were also called) that merely represented static objects or stationary persons. After all, sculpture and representational painting of everyday objects (*'nature morte'*) were already well-known art forms in classical antiquity, while still photography had faithfully depicted static scenes (including the unmoving bodies and visages of the dead) since the 1820s and 1830s.³ Trains arriving at the station and workers leaving the factory – bodies and objects in motion – were, by contrast, the attractions of the new medium. Cinema thus offered in abundance something that even the futurists and vorticists – Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Wyndham Lewis, Helen Saunders, Christopher Nevinson, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Ezra Pound – could only approximate by means of abstraction. No matter how beautiful and striking, colourful and energetic, artistically and formally superior were Boccioni's *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses* (1914–15), Gaudier-Brzeska's *Red Stone Dancer* (1913), Balla's *Abstract Speed + Sound* (1913–14), Helen Saunders' *Dance* (1915), and Coburn's *Vortographs* (1917), they could not capture the actual physical dynamism present in the Lumières' simple 46-second film of a train chugging into a station. To be sure, had not modernist filmmakers such as Griffith and Gance, Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov transformed the new medium into something more than a series of merely cinematographic representations of ordinary events and 'actualities' (documentary travelogues depicting 'exotic' peoples, places, and cultures), that is, into what was to become, arguably the twentieth century's most popular and influential art form, such comparisons would be merely silly. But from the moment of its birth, the new art offered its innovators an unmatched capacity to represent movement, speed, dynamism, and action, and its pioneers always implicitly, but usually quite consciously, instantiated in their works the very attributes of modern life that the futurist and vorticist painters, sculptors, photographers, and writers celebrated and desperately yearned to render fully.⁴

Admittedly, other art forms, including several beloved by European modernists, such as drama, opera, and dance, were able to embody motion on the stage. But the particular genius of cinema, one that was not realized until filmmakers such as Griffith, Gance, Pastrone, Eisenstein, and Vertov liberated the camera from its fixed station, was its power to move the spectator – figuratively, but most importantly, virtually. Pastrone's popularization of dolly shots in his epic *Cabiria* (1914), Eisenstein's memorable overhead tracking shots of a crowd fleeing from Czarist Imperial soldiers down the Odessa Steps in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Vertov and

his brother – cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman’s mounting of the camera (sometimes hand-held) on street-cars and automobiles hurling through the city streets in *The Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) – and Leni Riefenstahl’s aerial shots from within and without Hitler’s private plane as the German Chancellor descends through the clouds to land in Nuremberg in *Triumph of the Will* (1935), all contribute to the illusion that the historically passive and immobile spectator is now in motion, rapidly heading in potentially any direction and at speeds and altitudes unavailable to the ordinary urban pedestrian. This artistic drive to empower the spectator with a godlike freedom to move did not perish with the silent era. Indeed, the modernist ‘cult of mobility’ grows and develops with each new generation of filmmakers. The technological and formal advances of later directors and cinematographers who inaugurated the advent of so-called modernist cinema following the Second World War soon outmatched the early innovations of their predecessors. The opening dream sequence of Federico Fellini’s *8½* (1963), in which the camera tracks the protagonist, Guido Anselmi, as he escapes from a car trapped in an underground traffic jam in Rome and miraculously floats out of an underpass into the clouds and over the Italian coastline, and the incomparable tracking shot of Mikhail Kalatazov’s *I Am Cuba* (1964) in which the camera glides across the roof of a Havana hotel, down several flights of stairs, past numerous guests, and – having descended multiple floors – momentarily pauses, only to follow a sunbather into and under the water of the hotel pool (all without a cut), both testify to how deeply cinematic art remains committed to the modernist project of liberating the camera and mobilizing a passive spectator who is made to witness scenes of modern life.

The modernist cinematic embrace of motion, speed, and limitless mobility gave rise to complementary changes in an emergent sense of space and place (and vice versa). The latter has so many manifestations and variants that we must confine ourselves to an investigation of only one example: the way in which cinema re-visions the modern city as a habitable and knowable (if sometimes intimidating) place and likewise as a network of often invisible but critical social relations.⁵ One of the most important film genres to arise during the heyday of high modernism was the city symphony. Among the most popular and influential were Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand’s *Manhatta* (1921), Alberto Calvalcanti’s *Rien que les heures* (1926), Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927), Joris Ivens and Mannus Franken’s *Regen* (1929), and Vertov’s aforementioned *The Man with a Movie Camera*.⁶ Films without a prominent protagonist and without anything much resembling a character-driven plot, they chronicle a day in the life of a city – whether New York, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, or Nice (or as in Vertov’s film, a synthetic composite of Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa). In a roughly chronological series of juxtaposed scenes and vignettes showing the multifarious actions of anonymous citizens as they go about their ordinary lives from morning to night, these avant-garde documentaries render the modern city intelligible, readable, negotiable, and navigable. That is not to say that they fail to depict the bustle, confusion, crowds, traffic, randomness and apparent chaos of city life. The impression of seeming disorganization is an integral feature of the genre. But these films, which relentlessly move the spectator through the streets and alleys, public spaces, work places, and private lodgings of a city via a highly mobile camera eye, ultimately make of these seemingly separate and disconnected locations an integrated

urban whole. The city symphony provides a cognitive map by which the spectator learns to feel at home in the modern urb: he or she learns its rhythms and routines, its routes and arteries, its functions and flows, its products and exchanges, its factories and homes, its private hideaways and public spaces.⁷ That the modern city that emerges from apparent chaos is a fiction, a construction made possible by editorial sleight-of-hand, by montage, by carefully calculated cutting and splicing together of footage taken at different times and in different places (and often by different cameramen and crews), is one of the chief attractions of the genre. This is most conspicuously the case in Vertov's justly celebrated *Man with a Movie Camera*, which constructs an ideal city of the new Soviet regime – a cinematic utopia – from sequences filmed in three different aforementioned urban centres separated from one another by hundreds of miles: Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa. Vertov's city symphony, like those of his directorial contemporaries, resembles such famous modernist novels as Andrei Bely's *St. Petersburg*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, insofar as they all elaborate fictions in which even the most daunting, colossal, and alienating modern city (the relative smallness of provincial Dublin notwithstanding) becomes familiar, integrated, and knowable.

Most importantly, if it does not make modern urban life altogether 'neighbourly', the city symphony nonetheless renders life in the modern *topos* on a human scale. Such films dutifully present the alienating features of modern city life in lavish visual detail: its sometimes dangerous mechanized transport, its vast geographic expanse, its colossal buildings and heavily trafficked public thoroughfares, its anonymous populace, its routinized industrial activity, its crowded living and working conditions, its impersonal and noisy mass entertainments. But the camera's movement and the elliptical editing of these films also reveals that all the unnamed individuals who inhabit the great metropolis are, in fact, joined together in a kind of living, breathing, functioning collective. Despite the class divisions and tensions that are shown to be part of the fabric of urban life (even in Vertov's celebration of the new Soviet society), the citizens of the modern city work and live together in a kind of unacknowledged accord. Even if on the diegetic plane those individuals who inhabit the vast modern metropolis remain ignorant of its secret organization, the city symphony reveals (or at least creates the impression) that their lives are lived according to a hidden order and collective purpose – one made available to (and by) the privileged camera eye and thereby to the cinema spectator. The lives of modern urbanites are organized not so much by an invisible hand, but by an 'invisible eye'. What initially appear to be merely random events and actions, isolated and disconnected individual lives, ultimately comprise an unplanned, but nonetheless coordinated symphonic composition.

The new cinematic art thus allows the allegedly alienated individual of the modern city to see his or her life as part of a spontaneously ordered and purposive whole (and the collective activity of watching a movie in a public theatre contributes significantly to the experience of community), just as it provides him or her with a distinctly modern sense of mobility and freedom. The modernist features of the new art cultivated by its pioneers and early practitioners – the instantiation of speed and movement via the mobility of the camera eye, the emplacement of the individual within a larger communal order via montage, cutting, and scenic juxtaposition – thus

serve a compensatory function: they allow the movie-goer to feel (more) at home in the modern world. Of course, such artful representations of the scene of the modern necessarily depend on precise and careful timing. And so it is to a third crucial feature of cinematic modernism that we now turn: the capacity of the new art to represent, reimagine, and reorganize our experience of time.

'*Time printed in its factual forms and manifestations*: such is the supreme idea of cinema as an art' (Tarkovsky 1986: 62–3). Thus writes Andrei Tarkovsky, one of the great European directors of the post-war era (and an heir to the modernist revolution in cinema), in his famous commentary on the Lumières' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*. Vast forests were long ago cleared to produce a library of literary criticism devoted to modernist representations of time and temporality. In the works of Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Robert Musil, Italo Svevo, Franz Kafka, and Samuel Beckett, we encounter a daunting array of formal literary devices intended to convey an experience of temporality that is at once distinctively contemporary and yet decidedly different from that of the regulatory clock-time that has come to dominate modernity.⁸ But if modernist writers, to say nothing of those in other arts (e.g. Salvador Dali) have provided us with new and strikingly subjective representations of time, what distinctive contributions to our impressions of temporality might their cinematic counterparts offer in turn?

Perhaps the question is not quite fair. Almost all of the cinematic devices that filmmakers of the modernist era employed to manipulate and represent time – dilating, protracting, or accelerating it, subjectivizing and intensifying it – have (numerous and sundry) formal literary counterparts. But in at least one respect, the filmmaker possessed a singular advantage over his literary compatriots. Whereas the novelist might exercise control over the number of words and sentences in any given scene and in a work as a whole (notwithstanding the unwanted incursions of editors and publishers), the reader might nevertheless take as much or as little time to make her way through a narrative as she pleased – indeed could take long breaks from reading whenever she liked. By contrast, the filmmaker knows exactly how long a film will take to be viewed (making allowances for the re-editing of the film by an intrusive studio, government censor, or unscrupulous distributor). Even playwrights and composers cannot exercise this degree of total control over their respective media since performers and conductors may vary the *tempi* according to their likes. But at least in the age before the home VHS recorder and the DVD/BRD player, the *auteur* of cinema (the artist who directs and edits the film) may manipulate the temporal ratio of diegetic event to cinematic event experienced by the viewer to an unprecedented degree. And unlike the composer-performer (Mozart at the piano) or dancer-choreographer (Martha Graham), the filmmaker controlled a new medium in which the 'real' experience of time could be preserved (and altered) according to a governing artistic intention. As Tarkovsky observes:

For the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means to *take an impression of time*. And simultaneously the possibility of reproducing the time on screen as often as he wanted, to repeat it and go back to it. He acquired a matrix for *actual time*. Once seen and recorded, time could now be preserved in metal boxes over a long period (theoretically for ever). That is the

sense in which the Lumière films were the first to contain the seed of a new aesthetic principle.

(1986: 62)

As cinema emerged from its early infancy, its artistic pioneers represented the experience of time in ever more complex and innovative ways: Griffith, who is often credited (rightly or wrongly) with having introduced cross-cutting between different actions or scenes, might be said to have rendered a sense of simultaneity in a new and more powerful way. In *Intolerance*, Griffith's cross-cutting of four separate but parallel stories – the fall of ancient Babylon, the passion of Christ, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris in 1572, and a domestic melodrama of the present day – manages to lend to world history both a sense of immediacy (it can be experienced all over again and at once) and teleological order. Here the viewer's real experience of temporality merges (rather dubiously for the critically minded) with a mediated and reassuring interpretation of history. Eisenstein, no stranger to the re-presentation of historical events in such films as *The Battleship Potemkin* and *October* (1928), manipulates time to quite different political and emotional effect. In the famous 'Odessa Steps' montage sequence of *The Battleship Potemkin*, the march of the soldiers down the steps – as well as the flight of the citizens on whom they fire – is protracted and extended by virtue of Eisenstein's innovative cutting: actions filmed from multiple angles are repeated with slight variations such that the viewer watches the boots of the soldiers and the legs of their victims repeatedly descend the same set of steps several times. A scene that might have taken only a minute or two in 'real time' is thus rendered as an extended sequence that takes over six minutes of running time. (A critical eye attentive to the varying lengths of shadows cast by the actors and props will discern that the scene was in fact filmed in various lighting conditions over many hours and at different times of the day).

Eisenstein clearly intends this cinematically rendered 'historical' event (no such massacre took place on the Odessa Steps in 1905) to legitimate the authority of the new Soviet regime and the mythology of its foundation. But even as Eisenstein aims to shape his viewers' understanding of recent political history, he also wishes to produce in them a particular inter-subjective temporal experience of a pivotal public 'event'. A baby carriage carrying a helpless infant takes an 'eternity' to bounce down the steps before it capsizes. A defenseless woman shot through the eye (the lens of her spectacles shattered) takes an 'epoch' of screen-time to collapse. The reaction of another woman to an abdominal wound she receives from the volleys of the soldiers is broken up into a series of discrete shots interspersed among several others of the mass frenzy on the Odessa steps. A fallen and injured child is trampled repeatedly for nearly thirty seconds (of running time) by fleeing civilians. The torments of several other wounded citizens are presented in slow motion and intercut with action shots filmed at normal speed (roughly 16 fps in the silent era). The intended effect of Eisenstein's manipulation of time is to protract and intensify the viewer's sense of shock, terror, and moral outrage. But if Eisenstein 'sculpts' time in order to convey the particular horrors of early twentieth-century life in Czarist Russia, he does so in order to justify the new order of the Soviet communist regime. His film is a meticulously crafted and astoundingly innovative work of cinematic art; it is also a consummate instance of political propaganda meant to justify the radical modernization of Russian

society under a revolutionary and ‘progressive’ Communist regime that understood itself to represent the final goal of modernity, the telos of world history.

Along with its revolutionary capacity to alter traditional notions and customary experiences of motion and spatial relations, the modernist cinema granted the artist a new power to represent, manipulate, and reorganize our experience of time and temporality, and thereby promised to reconcile the modern individual with the historical development we term modernity. The ‘seventh art’ thus fully participated in a multifarious artistic revolution that introduced new ways to represent the distinctive experiences of modern life. Even more alluringly, cinematic modernism proffered new powers that would allow all movie-goers the freedom to refashion their lives, their experiences, their sensibilities, their moral and political values, even their very selves so that they might reconcile themselves with modernity itself. The worldwide popularity of cinema, one unmatched by any of the other modernist arts, is perhaps due, in no small measure, to the fact that it alone offered a new Faustian power not only to the singular genius or lone cultural Mandarin, but to the modern Everyman.

NOTES

1. The Italian film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo, in his 1923 essay *Reflections on the Seventh Art*, coined the phrase ‘the seventh art’. Canudo had earlier classified cinema as ‘the sixth art’ in his 1911 manifesto, *The Birth of the Sixth Art*.
2. The first ‘phantom ride’ short, *The Haverstraw Tunnel*, released in 1897 by the American Mutoscope Co., featured a camera mounted on a moving train. Pastrone helped to popularize tracking or dolly shots in his 1914 epic, *Cabiria*; moving camera shots subsequently became popularly known as ‘*Cabiria* movements’. For an influential discussion of the subject, see Trotter.
3. Given that the first widely used photographic process, the daguerreotype, required an exposure time of several seconds to obtain a sharp image, it is no accident that stationary inanimate objects – most particularly the dead – proved to be preferred subjects of the new medium.
4. In *The Cinema* (1920), a painting by the one-time vorticist William Roberts, as in Ezra Pound’s characterization of the degraded art of the modern era in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* (“The “age demanded” chiefly a mould in plaster Made with no loss of time/A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster/Or the “sculpture” of rhyme”), one detects the *resentiment* of modernist painters and poets who envy the filmmaker his more popular, modern, and dynamic medium.
5. For a brief discussion of the emergence of cinema and its dependent relationship on the modern city, see Moses.
6. For a particularly insightful discussion of the genre, one to which this chapter is deeply indebted, see Marcus.
7. For more on the utopian idea of the legibility of the city and modernist art, see Klein.
8. The philosophical distinction between temporality and clock-time is widely credited to Henri Bergson (2001), whose insights were deepened and developed in the later work of Martin Heidegger (1962); Bergson’s book was originally published in French in 1889 and Heidegger’s in German in 1927.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

INVENTING ABSTRACTION? Modernist dance in Europe



Juliet Bellow and Nell Andrew

In 2012–13, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York staged *Inventing Abstraction: 1910–1925*, a revisionist history of European modernism. Visitors to the exhibition encountered at its entryway a mural-size diagram that served as an informational tool and abstract work in its own right.¹ This image mapped connective ligaments among artists that the curator, Leah Dickerman, considered to have ‘played a significant role in the development of a new modern language for the arts’ (Dickerman 2012: front endpapers). Dickerman signalled her intention to revisit abstraction’s role in modernism through the diagram’s reference to an earlier precedent: a chart drawn up by MoMA’s founding director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to accompany the landmark 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Now rather infamous, Barr’s diagram is narrowly exclusive and neatly teleological. Premised upon the work of a small group of male painters based in Western Europe, the chart ‘normalizes, as the only modernism, a particular and gendered set of practices,’ as Griselda Pollock trenchantly observed in her essay ‘Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity’ (Pollock 1988: 50). More broadly, *Cubism and Abstract Art* stands for an outmoded art history, one premised on autonomous formal developments within a hermetically conceived art world.

Inventing Abstraction promised to update Barr’s discredited model, even as it paid homage to its predecessor, in so doing cementing MoMA’s role as arbiter of the modernist canon. Where Barr traces artistic movements in a sequential evolution, Dickerman’s diagram maps multiple, simultaneous interactions among individual artists. It reframes the early twentieth-century avant-garde in early twenty-first century terms, as a social network, and encompass a broader range of media than Barr’s original. Mixed among the painters we would expect MoMA to include, this chart features poets, photographers, composers, filmmakers, and dancer-choreographers.

We take *Inventing Abstraction*’s incorporation of three modernist figures of dance (Vaslav Nijinsky, Mary Wigman, and Rudolf Laban) to constitute a potentially ground-breaking choice. Although histories of modernism increasingly take a comparative approach, considering cross-currents in literature, film, music and visual art, dance’s place in such accounts still lags behind. Perhaps that is because this art – woven from the interaction of concrete bodies with ephemeral

movement, or a choreographer's marks with past performances – resists fixed form more resolutely than other media. Not easily reduced to a text, score, image, or object, dance eludes attempts at its full recording or recovery, and thus often falls between the gaps of historical narratives and languages. Moreover, dance's affiliation with mass culture at the turn of the twentieth century barred its full acceptance among the 'high arts'. Yet for precisely these reasons, many modernist writers and artists looked to dance to model or enact rejections of traditional form, language, medium, even the past writ large. This affirmation of the vitality and contemporaneity of dance was predicated on a belief in its fundamental opposition to linguistic and pictorial modes: it held status as chief among 'the arts that are practiced mutely', as the Viennese poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal put it in 1895 (1956: 228). Dance played a central role in the development of a modernist sensibility – but that role, in retrospect, often is reduced to an absent presence, with dance appearing primarily through the mediating lenses of other arts. Usually produced as textual anecdote or supplemental illustration, dance plays the roles of muse or foil to modernism's less transient creative media.

With Nijinsky, Wigman, and Laban at its heart, MoMA's new chart took a step toward an inclusive, intermedial history of modernism. Yet the museum setting largely prevented *Inventing Abstraction* from showcasing the wide range of sensory, material, and intellectual data through which these dancer-choreographers created meaning. Nijinsky, Wigman, and Laban's 'danced abstractions' (as the catalogue termed their work) were represented through drawings, photographs, and films rather than choreographic works. Without direct correlation to embodied practice, the display of Laban's and Wigman's choreographic notations and sketches became significant for their status as images: their apparent visual similarities with nearby non-dance pictures trumped their original function as notations, created to complement, generate, or record dance works. Conversely, films of dance (such as Wigman's *Witch Dance II*, 1926) are problematic in this context because they do not appear abstract in the same mould. Rooted in the body, an entity nowhere else pictured as concretely in the exhibition, filmed dance appeared anomalous in ways that cast its claim to modernist abstraction in doubt.

How, then, can dance take part in a general history of modernism without reducing the medium to models of abstraction afforded by other arts? In what follows, we sketch out just such a counter-history of abstraction. Part of our aim is to demonstrate, through its own history and its relations with other arts, dance's role as a prime symbol and purveyor of modernist embodiment and affect. Like other arts, modern dance around the turn of the twentieth century sought non-narrative, non-representational, and often self-referential formal vocabularies. But because the medium itself comes into being through dialectical relations – of art and life, form and content – dance joins the artist's expressive idea with its material manifestation more visibly than other arts. Insofar as it creates the illusion of an intuitive, non-discursive process and product, dance often appears as if unmediated (or a 'motivated' sign, in linguistic terms); its seemingly direct relation to the body suggests an even more immediate relation of idea and experience than the 'condition of music' to which, following Victorian critic Walter Pater's declaration, all arts purportedly aspire (Pater 1986 [1877]: 86). For modern writers, artists, and critics, from James Joyce to Wassily Kandinsky to Clement Greenberg, Pater's idea of music as an

inherently abstract language resonated deeply (Joyce 1974 [c.1922]: 106; Kandinsky 1994 [1912]: 154; Greenberg 1993 [1940]: 32). However, as we show in what follows, an overview of European dance reveals more than its participation in broadly shared conceptions of abstraction. Dancer-choreographers of this period created forms of abstraction that have not yet been recognized as such. In their work, actual bodies, bodily surrogates or images, and tactile or kinaesthetic sensations – entities and phenomena almost entirely expunged from modernist practice in other arts – all played key roles in the urge to abstraction. Dance in this period thus not only illustrates familiar conceptions of early twentieth-century abstraction, but also helps us to redefine that central principle of modernism.²

The framing of abstraction as a turn-of-the-century ‘invention’ first necessitates a choice about where to pinpoint its origin. Dickerman selected as her starting-point Pablo Picasso’s cubist paintings of 1910 (2012: 14). But how might it change our understanding of modernism if we entertained the possibility that dance came to abstraction prior to painting? From the 1890s into the early twentieth century, avant-garde concert dance liberated traditional conceptions of time, movement, form, and the body in space more fully than other arts. The American-born Loïe Fuller (performed 1892–1928) pioneered such an abstract vocabulary: she manipulated silk drapery and electric lights to create a non-narrative, often non-figurative genre that fused bodily movement with immaterial ideas and sensations. In the *Serpentine Dance* (1892), her first such work, Fuller presented a live performance of colour and shape in constant flux and renewal, never locking into a single form or pose. This was a spectacle motivated by the body, but one in which the human figure itself was almost entirely invisible. To some degree, her danced abstraction derived from other arts: her use of bright, saturated colour and non-referential serpentine lines adapted aspects of vanguard music and plastic art. In this way, Fuller reinvented dance as an elite art. At the same time, Fuller’s dance suggested new paths for abstraction in other media. She not only influenced modern dancers, such as Isadora Duncan (choreographing 1900–23), to distil movement to its basic forms; she also inspired plastic artists like James McNeill Whistler, Auguste Rodin, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who responded to her dance with paintings, sculptures, and prints, as well as poets including Stéphane Mallarmé and W.B. Yeats.

Yeats famously asked ‘how can we know the dancer from the dance?’ He put his finger on modern dance’s complex permutations of figure and ground, subject and object, form and content (Yeats 1996 [1926]: 217). For Mallarmé, dance was ‘alone capable, in its summary writing, of translating the fleeting and the sudden all the way to the Idea’ (Mallarmé 2003 [1885]: 154). A common goal for symbolist artists across media was to blend the concrete materials of art with its metaphysical dimensions, and Fuller’s technique achieved such an abstract mode. She unified the artist with her form, the form with its space, the subjective idea with a universal body – literally embodying ideals that other arts could only articulate in theory. With mesmerizing repetitions of pattern and light, Fuller imprinted impressions on the eye and mind, prolonging the ephemeral in ways that altered viewers’ experience of time. Created at the same moment as Jules-Etienne Marey’s chronophotographic motion studies as well as the first cinematic séances, Fuller’s dance offered itself as a parallel example of controlled temporality (and, tellingly, many period films used imitators of Fuller to demonstrate that property of the new technology). In this complex



Figure 35.1 Loie Fuller dansant : scène de théâtre japonais. Paris, Théâtre de l'Athénée, 1901.
ID/Cote: 4-ICO THE-4678. *La gesha et le chevalier*, drame du vieux Japon: 1901.
Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

network of interactions between artistic media, we can see dance pioneering a kind of abstraction in the dimensions of time and space.

Fuller and Duncan's initial investigations into danced abstraction fuelled the total reinvention of theatre ballet in the first decades of the twentieth century by several solo dancers and companies. Foremost among these was the Ballets Russes (1909–29), premised upon a reform of ballet in light of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). Modern dance forerunners inspired the troupe to reshape both ballet technique and the production process: the company implemented a collaborative working method to fuse choreography with score and design. While critics in Paris, where the Ballets Russes initially was based, immediately connected these synthetic works with Mallarmé's ideal dance form, the years 1912–13 proved crucial in the troupe's interrogation of the boundaries between media. Over those two years, Nijinsky served as the Ballets Russes' star dancer and its chief choreographer, creating three ballets – *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (*Afternoon of a Faun*, 1912), *Jeux* (*Games*, 1913), and *Le Sacre du printemps* (*Rite of Spring*, 1913) – that translated modernist principles in painting and music into balletic form. Though in a sense continuing the tradition of the 'story ballet', these productions treated their themes (ranging from pastoral myth and ancient ritual to modern romance) in veiled, allusive form, functioning primarily as a vehicle to explore new configurations of the dancing body. In all three ballets, Nijinsky operated the human instrument as a collection of discontinuous, semi-autonomous parts. Imposing a rigid, geometric stylization to the

dancers' bodily carriage, he emphasized whenever possible its straight lines and angles; his movement vocabulary consisted of relatively simple (though often awkward) steps, performed in staccato bursts alternating with stillness. Nijinsky's choreography blended classical ballet technique with a range of external sources, including Dalcrozian eurhythmic exercises, popular dances, and ordinary, everyday movement. Infamously, in *Sacre*, the corps de ballet abandoned balletic grace altogether: they shuffled, lurched, and stomped, turning in their knees and toes and rounding or arching their backs in seeming rebuke to, or parody of, the very history of ballet.

Like Fuller, Nijinsky adapted existing modes of abstraction in other media. The abrupt motions and planar, fragmented appearance of Nijinsky's dancers paralleled vanguard styles in painting and music. Reviews often compared his 'cubist dance' with canvases by Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso, noting with dismay the grotesque, dehumanizing effect incurred in the transfer of style from a two-dimensional, static medium to a live, embodied one. Critics likewise decried the disjunction of Nijinsky's 'square' choreography with Claude Debussy's fluid scores for *Faune* and *Jeux*; in contrast, his technique seemed perfectly suited to the jarring shifts of tempo and instrumentation in Igor Stravinsky's score for *Sacre*. But as with Fuller, Nijinsky's choreography proved an avatar of modernism. He distilled dance to its most basic elements – space, time, rhythm, line – elements held in common with painting and music, but deployed and experienced through the living body. By projecting a quasi-mechanical aspect onto his dancers, making them strangely inhuman or even object-like, his ballets also imaged the potentially dystopic effects of industrial modernity on the human experience.

The same year of *Sacre*'s premiere, poet and dramaturge Valentine de Saint-Point published a manifesto in *Le Figaro* outlining her theory for a new dance-based genre she called *Métachorie*. Responsive to Mallarmé's concept of dance-as-writing, Saint-Point's aim was to create a *danse idéiste*: a form synthesizing the sensual aspects of embodied movement with the cerebrality and stylization she found in the arts of music, poetry, and painting. In an interview conducted before her first metachoric performance, Saint-Point complained that dance had not yet evolved into an autonomous art; rooted in theatrical pantomime and musical 'illustration', dance, she argued, must evolve into non-narrative form (Chevalier 1913: 1). Paradoxically, the evolution toward *Métachorie* hinged on a fusion of arts, combining sound, word, image, gesture, and even scent in a bid to create a genre 'beyond dance'. In some ways, Saint-Point's goal and approach stemmed from her loose affiliation with F.T. Marinetti and the Italian futurists: like Marinetti's invented genre of *parole in libertà* ('words-in-freedom'), *Métachorie* aimed to transcend divisions of the material and the immaterial, body and mind.

Saint-Point's *Métachorie* premiered on 20 December 1913 at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées (a stage in the same theatre complex used by the Ballets Russes). The performance consisted of a solo dance in four sections, in which Saint-Point employed a style ranging from sharp and angular to soft, flowing movement. She was accompanied by the sounds of an offstage actor reading 12 of her poems as well as a live orchestra playing music adapted from vanguard compositions by Roland Manuel, Florent Schmitt, Claude Debussy, and Erik Satie. Incense wafted into the air while electric lights projected a changing sequence of abstract 'idea figures' against a simple

backcloth. *Métachorie*'s layering of kinaesthetic, visual, aural, and olfactory stimuli seems designed to elicit synaesthetic correspondences while highlighting the disjunctions between different forms of sensory experience. Though Saint-Point encouraged viewers to see the 'idea figures' as sources for her movement, *Métachorie* aimed to move dance beyond the illustrative or the purely visual: her use of sound and smell activated an outward expansion of the dancer's form into space, uniting the performer and stage environment with the audience both literally and metaphorically. When Guillaume Apollinaire penned his manifesto, 'L'Antitradition futuriste,' the critic called in Bergsonian fashion for 'continuity simultaneity as opposed to particularity and division,' and for 'intuition speed ubiquity' (Apollinaire 1974 [1913]: 124). Linking these trans-avant-garde impulses to 'physical transcendentalism' and 'pure choreography' – in other words, to abstract dance – he hailed Saint-Point among the names in the anti-tradition.

Other related manifestations of 'danced abstraction' took place east of Paris under the rubric of expressionism. Overtly subjective and embodied, this free or absolute dance – which came to be termed *Ausdruckstanz* ('dance of expression') after the Second World War – explored gesture as a primary vehicle for the communication of inner states. The term 'expressionism' unites a range of early twentieth-century movements in the visual arts (primarily, the Künstlergruppe Brücke in Dresden and the Blaue Reiter in Munich) with dance styles developed in the same period by Laban and Wigman and their acolytes. Both painterly and danced expressionisms emerged from early twentieth-century *körperkultur* ('body culture') and *lebensreform* ('life reform') movements, with their emphasis on harmony between the inner life and its outer manifestation. Wigman's training in rhythmic gymnastics at Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's school of music (founded 1910 in Hellerau, near Dresden) allowed her to conceptualize dance as a means to externalize somatic and psychological sensations. In 1913, at the recommendation of the painter Emil Nolde, Wigman joined the utopian community founded by Laban that year on Monte Verità near Ascona, Switzerland.

The performance style both dancer-choreographers began to explore while in neutral Switzerland during the First World War, and continued to employ in solo and group dances throughout the 1920s and 1930s, hinged upon dramatic contrasts within the body (through the opposition of parts) and in its relation to space and time (with contrasts of rapid and slow, upward and downward movements). Addressing ostensibly universal human themes such as death or taking on archetypal personae (as in her *Witch Dance*), Wigman often employed masks to depersonalize and abstract the performer. These dance principles developed through connections to expressionism in the plastic arts: Laban was an admirer of Kandinsky, for example. They, in turn, influenced painterly explorations of line, colour and space. Kandinsky – who experimented with multimedia, synaesthetic projects such as *The Yellow Sound* (1909) early in his career – collaborated with Wigman's student Gret Palucca in 1926 on *Dance Curves*, a book that paired photographs of Palucca dancing with Kandinsky's linear renderings of each frozen pose. With a movement vocabulary comprised of torqued spirals, outstretched limbs, and bursting leaps, Palucca offered a new way to conceive of line that borrowed from proprioceptive or kinesthetic experience, and helped Kandinsky to infuse plastic images with those performative, embodied qualities.

The model of pure or abstract dance provided by *Ausdrucksstanz* also proved influential beyond expressionist circles in Germany: during the 1910s and 1920s, dada artists viewed performance as a primary means to their politically radical ends, deploying bodily humour, grotesque miming, and expressive gesture as forms of resistance to bourgeois propriety and the ongoing carnage of war. Dada's founders, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, had been immersed in the Munich *Blauer Reiter* group, and adapted expressionist ideas about the interconnectedness of colour, sound, and movement in events staged at the Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie Dada in Zurich, the nucleus of dada at that time. Dance became a central component of dada practice, as when Cabaret Voltaire habitués were given paper masks by Marcel Janco that 'simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance' (Ball 1996 [1916]: 64). Dada artists Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp spent time at Laban's school at Monte Verità; Taeuber trained extensively in dance under Laban. The connections between these circles deepened when, in 1917, Laban opened a school in Zurich. Not only did Wigman give a performance for dada artists in 1918, but in a special issue of *Der Zeltweg* in October 1919 her photograph shared the page with dada Tristan Tzara's essay, 'Carnage Abracadabrant'.

The key event of the dada group's final soirée on 9 April 1919 was Sophie Taeuber's *Noir Kakadu*, a dance with abstract sets by Hans Richter and Hans Arp. Taeuber's redirection of the principles of *Ausdrucksstanz* toward dadaist ends is indicated in the one surviving document of her dances in Zurich, an anonymous photograph of her in full body costume and mask with two vacantly-staring mismatched eyes, topped by a jagged crown. Black fabric hides Taeuber's lower legs and shoulders, so that her torso and limbs seem to float separately, as if strung in space like the marionettes she would soon design for a psychoanalytic production of Carlo Gozzi's *King Stag* (1918). The use of masked bodies and human surrogates to aid the synthesis of art with life – simultaneously carried out in Italy by the futurist designer Fortunato Depero in his automaton ballet, *I Balli plastici* (1918) – constituted an important but often unrecognized manifestation of danced abstraction. Recognizable as a body yet also not fully human, such figures, further abstracted through choreographic motion, provided the necessary distance for modernist social critique or the invention of alternative frameworks.

During the 1920s, visual artists also began to work directly as designers of sets and costumes for major stage compositions, or as choreographers of dance – further blurring the line between the arts in the process. The Ballets Russes inaugurated this new phase of cross-media exploration in the late 1910s, as the troupe's impresario Serge Diaghilev forged a series of alliances with painters and composers based in Paris. The 1917 premiere of the ballet *Parade*, designed by Picasso with a score by Satie, proved a watershed moment of collaboration, emulated widely throughout the European avant-garde. Rolf de Maré created the Ballets Suédois (1920–5), and engaged cutting-edge artists including Fernand Léger and Francis Picabia to collaborate with choreographer Jean Börlin. Both artists revolutionized the concept and practice of stage design by reconfiguring the relations between dancer, costume, and set. Léger's *La Création du monde* (1923) transformed human actors into mobile scenery, wearing or holding cardboard costumes that blended visually into the décor; Picabia's set for *Rélâche*, comprising 370 electric klieg lights, transcended the boundaries of the stage in a sensory assault on the audience. In Russia, artists of the

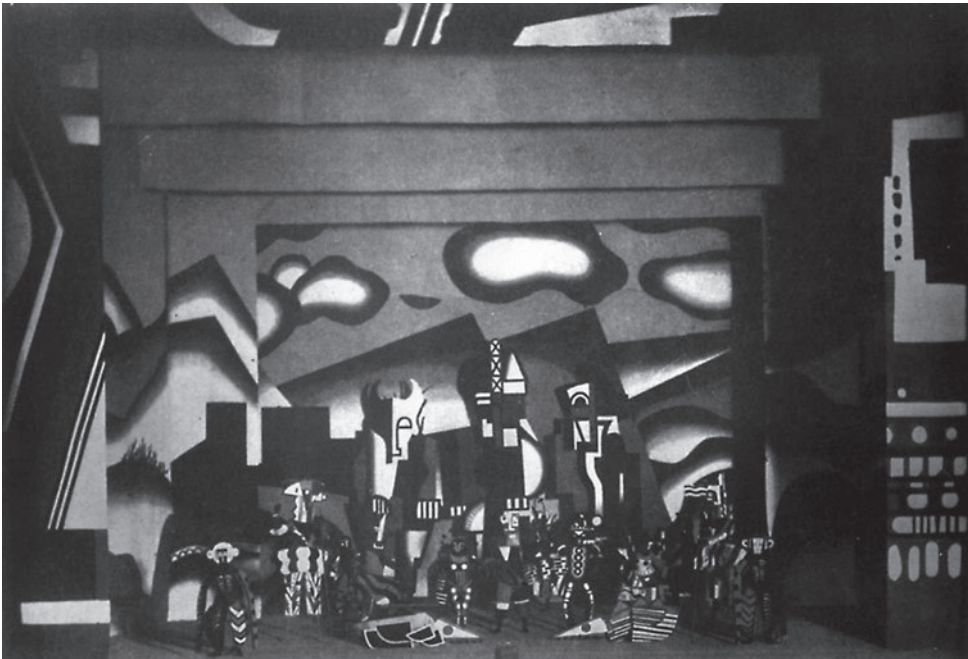


Figure 35.2 Fernand Léger's ballet *La création du monde*.
© Dansmuseet–Musée Rolf de Maré Stockholm.

avant-garde extended and politicized Diaghilev's model in experiments with constructivist theatre design, creating abstract sculptural sets for the actors to interact with as they performed, as with Liubov Popova's machine design for Vsevolod Meyerhold's *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922).

The dancing body as such a hybrid of plastic, organic, and mechanical parts was placed under live analysis at Germany's Bauhaus under the direction of its theatre master, Oskar Schlemmer. His three-act *Triadic Ballet*, which premiered in Stuttgart in 1922 and was performed with new iterations throughout the decade, involved a dozen dancers in abstract costumes designed to articulate the body's individual parts and its shifting relationships to space and motion. Originally hired to lead the mural painting programme at Bauhaus Dessau, Schlemmer soon devoted himself to theatre as a laboratory in which he might stage the conflicting drives of modern art, its intuitive or spiritual idea and its mechanical, technological form. Publishing his theory in a 1924 essay titled 'Man and Art Figure', Schlemmer wrote of the stage as the meeting place of art and life. This was a powerful position in the wake of the First World War and the Bolshevik and German revolutions, when European avant-gardes struggled to assert the productivity of their aesthetic commitments. The art-figures of the *Triadic Ballet* were encased in sculptural costumes that also read as diagrams of their potential movements. In synthesizing man and art, Schlemmer offered an incongruous mix of whimsy and estrangement, overlaying the pathos and universality of a doll or puppet with the uncanny quasi-human mechanism setting it in motion.

Many artists and writers across three decades of modernist experimentation found bodily movement, as the most concrete connector of space and time, an ideal medium

of, and metaphor for, modernism's dynamic, innovative, or synthetic aims. For some time, however, dance's relationship to the other arts has played only a marginal part in modernist histories. In fact, it often figures as modernism's death knell, as the rise of embodied practices during the 1960s signalled a shift to postmodernism and a 'post-medium' condition in purported contrast to the practices and values of the early twentieth century. The history outlined here begins to put dance on equal footing with its sister arts at the core of modernist expression. Not only was dance integrally involved in the network of artists who 'invented' abstraction, but it served as a model of and a vehicle for the modernist quest to bring art directly into the sphere of life.

NOTES

We would like to acknowledge our debt to the participants in a seminar at the 2012 Modernist Studies Association conference, *The (In)Visible Spectacle: Dance, Modernism, and Visual Culture*, organized by Juliet Bellow and Gustav Frank, and co-led by Nell Andrew and S. Elise Archias. Many of the questions this chapter addresses were discussed fruitfully at that table.

1. Also frontispiece to the exhibition catalogue.
2. Recent scholarship has begun to unearth the radical innovations of avant-garde dance and the complexity of dance's correspondences with other arts in the modernist period. Among others, see scholarship by Ann Cooper Albright; Ramsay Burt; Kate Elswit; Mark Franko; Susan Laikin Funkenstein; Lynn Garafola; Susan Jones; Juliet Koss; Susan Manning; Carrie Preston; and this chapter's authors.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

LITERATURE IN EUROPE



Vassiliki Kolocotroni

‘When we assume that a literature exists we assume a great deal’, wrote T. S. Eliot in a 1919 review of a history of Scottish literature for *The Athenaeum*, and proceeded to lay the ground rules for a line of argumentation that led him to answer the question posed by his title, ‘Was There a Scottish Literature?’ in the negative:

We do not suppose merely a ‘history’, for there might be a history of Tamil literature; but a part of History, which for us is the history of Europe. We suppose not merely a corpus of writings in one language, but writings and writers between whom there is a tradition; [...] a greater, finer, more positive, more comprehensive mind than the mind of any period.

(1919: 680)

For Eliot here, as in much of his writing on culture and the concept of tradition central to his vision, literatures compete for recognition, a sense of broader value or temporal continuity, as well as, quite literally, for (and in) actual space:

It is not always recognized how fierce and fatal is the struggle for existence between literatures. [...] A powerful literature, with a powerful capital, tends to attract and absorb all the drifting shreds of force about it. [...] [A] provincial capital [...] is the matter of a moment; it depends on the continuous supply of important men; the instant this supply falls off, the metropolis, even if suffering from a like poverty, gains the ascendant. And then the important men turn to the metropolis.

(1919: 681)

The fact that this stridently ideological view was expounded by a North American aspiring cultural arbiter seeking his roots in Europe is perhaps less ironic than may seem at first glance. Not unlike religious converts – and Eliot was soon to become a convert to the Anglican Church (in 1926), as well as a naturalized British subject (in 1927) – whose conscious choices are more staunchly defended, a ‘Europeanized

modern',¹ perhaps even more than a mere modern European, would pronounce on the fortune of literatures in Europe. Eliot's advocacy of the centralizing powers of 'capitals of civilization', embodied in the mobilization of 'important men' in the service of (capitalized) 'History', as coterminous with the history of Europe, is a paradigmatic example of the centripetal tendency which we associate with Eurocentric, metropolitan modernism.² 'Everything has come to Europe, and everything has come out of it', claimed the French writer Paul Valéry in a similar vein and in the pages of the same journal earlier that year, reflecting on the 'intellectual crisis' threatening Europe with a '*diminutio capitis*' ('diminution of capital') (1919b: 279, 280). As he put it in a previous 'letter from France', again in *The Athenaeum*, 'We civilizations now know that we are mortal', echoing contemporary concerns about culture in the wake of the First World War, but also attributing the pre-war 'disorder of our mental Europe' to a typically modern 'free co-existence in all cultivated minds of the most heterogeneous ideas' (1919a: 182, 183). By 1914, Valéry argued, Europe had arrived 'at the limit of this modernism', and as an 'intellectual Hamlet' 'now look[ed] upon millions of ghosts' (183, 184).

As defensive statements, Eliot's and Valéry's reflections bring into focus the contested, perennially crisis-ridden character of Europe as a literary and cultural space,³ and the fragility of its borders. Already in 1906, Joseph Conrad, the francophone Polish émigré who wrote his major works in English, had commented on 'the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action' in 'the civilized world' (1921: 111). Debunking Victor Hugo's late nineteenth century notion of an 'illustrious, rich, thoughtful, peaceful' federalist nation that '[would] be called Europe in the twentieth century; and in the centuries that follow, transformed still more, [would] be called humanity' (qtd. in Bru 2009: 4–5), Conrad found instead that '*Il n'y a plus d'Europe* – there is only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death, and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions' (1921: 112). Reprising the motif of moral bankruptcy and the grotesque perversions of human agency in the pursuit of wealth and power which he explored in tales of colonial ventures gone wrong, such as 'An Outpost of Progress' (1897), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and *Nostromo* (1904), Conrad stakes a rather grand claim for Europe's moral responsibility for both itself and the world. His vision in the same essay of a 'universal city' to be built as the guarantee of the 'true peace of the world' (107), like Valéry's concern for the future of the 'European mind' (1919b: 280), is a political challenge, as well as a matter of how linguistic and literary capital is best deployed.

The exilic and cosmopolitan migrations of European transnationals such as Conrad and other citizens of a self-proclaimed 'world republic of letters' (Casanova 2004) relied on and effected the intellectual and linguistic diffusion and heterogeneity that Valéry identified with European modernism, but also created a momentum for the pursuit of a literary common language intelligible across national and cultural boundaries. For the exponents of symbolism, the aesthetic movement that declared itself an enemy of 'teaching, declamation, false sensibility, and objective description', as Jean Moréas, the Paris-based Greek poet, argued in the founding 'Symbolist Manifesto' (1886), a 'new vocabulary' of 'unpolluted words', 'restored and modernized', was necessary for the clearing of a new space for language abused by

rhetoric (2001 [1886]: 148). An international,⁴ pan-artistic movement, with the explicit aim of transcending linguistic and formal boundaries policed by bourgeois taste and the newly expanded ('mass') audiences it held in its thrall, symbolism is often seen as the efflorescence of a deliberately obscure, anti-realist style that attempted to re-sacralize art, or as Arthur Symons, one of its early promoters, put it, to 'spiritualise literature' (1980 [1899]: 8). In its transcendent and restorative function, language in symbolist poetry and prose works by suggestion, towards an inner rhythm of evocation and absence; in the words of Stéphane Mallarmé, the movement's central figure:

Everything will be held as if suspended: the disposition of parts, alternations and contraries, converging on a total rhythm, which will be the very silence of the poem, in its blank spaces, as that silence is translated in its own way by every component of the book, suspended in time and space.

(2001 [1896]: 151)

For Mallarmé, '[s]peech has only a commercial interest in reality; in literature, allusions are sufficient: their inherent qualities are extracted, and then embodied in an idea. Song, when it becomes an unburdened joy, soars heavenward. I call this goal Transposition' (150). 'Transposition' of speech into song and 'translation' of blank spaces into rhythm herald a new aesthetic articulation that 'involves the disappearance of the poet as a speaking subject' (151), and points towards a transcendent, supra-literary horizon: 'For what is the charm of literature if it is not [...] to open the book, and the text itself, to the volatile scattering of the spirit, whose sole purpose for existence lies within the realm of universal musicality?' (150)

The claim to 'universal musicality', with its Wagnerian undertones, and the creation of 'a word, total in itself, new, foreign to language and close to incantation' (152), distinguishes symbolism from the cognate and near contemporaneous aesthetic project of decadence, which, though sharing some of symbolism's defamiliarizing gestures, was concerned more with unsettling accepted notions of beauty and aesthetic pleasure and disrupting the normalized boundary between nature and artifice. The countercultural effect (at least as perceived by their detractors)⁵ of decadent works such as Charles Baudelaire's poetic sequence *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*, 1857), Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *À rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884) and its reincarnation in Oscar Wilde's equally scandalous *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il Piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*, 1889), was never fully matched by the symbolists, at least not in terms of public notoriety, despite the appearance of Mallarmé alongside Tristan Corbière and Arthur Rimbaud in Paul Verlaine's anthology of *Poètes maudits* (*Accursed poets*), a 'rude phalange' of outcasts, as Verlaine put it (1884: 1).⁶ Yet the very identification of a 'crisis in poetry', the debt to Baudelaire's sign- and sensation-filled cosmic modernity (as the 'forest of symbols' through which Man passes in his 'Correspondences', the sonnet from *Les Fleurs du mal* often invoked by symbolist writers), as well as the vision of the liberated word, dislocated from the world and open to the vicissitudes of chance (embodied in Mallarmé's 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* [*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*]), establishes a vocabulary of rupture and the pursuit of alternative realities that goes on to become the impetus for many European modernisms.

Importantly too, symbolism explores the literary potential of a radically altered interiority, as in the ‘work of *subject deformation*’ integral to the ‘symbolic novel’ for Moréas (qtd. in Nicholls 1995: 66), and deployed in an early use of the interior monologue by Edouard Dujardin in *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (*The Bays Are Sere*, 1888 – one of the prototypes for James Joyce’s later experiments); the ironized, self-doubting, and masquerading poetic personae of Jules Laforgue; the expansive, excessive ‘*vagabundance*’ of experience in André Gide’s early writing (qtd. in Nicholls 1995: 74); but perhaps most iconically in Rimbaud’s figuration of the poet as pathfinder for the unknown through a ‘*derangement of all the senses*’ (1998: 110). The revolutionary fervour of the precocious poet, inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871 and expended in a brief life of exploration and risk-taking at all levels, underscores the few but influential works: the long poem *Le Bateau ivre* (*The Drunken Boat*, 1871), and the prose poem sequences *Une Saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*, 1873) and *Les Illuminations* (*Illuminations*, 1874). Rimbaud’s conviction that ‘I is someone else’ (Rimbaud 1998: 109), and the vision of the ‘fraternal awakening’ of collective energies (Rimbaud 1991: 165), though seemingly paradoxical, resonate with ideas of a classless, universal humanity as well as the notion of the self as the site of that struggle, or to invoke another key modernist mode, the supreme experiment. The brevity and incompleteness (some would say failure) of the vision, as a set of random, boundless, and sudden ‘illuminations’ subject to chance rather than causality or rational design, and the absolute connection of art and life as a simultaneous pursuit and practice of emancipation, are emblematic for modernist and vanguard experiments to follow: from the Swiss Blaise Cendrars’s picaresque accounts of actual and fantastic journeys (for instance, in the 1913 poem *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* [*The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France*] or the 1926 novel of limit-experiences *Moravagine*), to surrealism, the project of personal and ‘collective innervation’ (Benjamin 1998 [1929]: 569) that sought the everyday marvellous and its Rimbaudian images of ‘convulsive beauty’ (Breton 1960: 160).

Expansive or fractured selves are of course a staple of European modernisms: as English novelist Virginia Woolf sought to illustrate in her kaleidoscopic rendition of fluid subjectivities, ‘the true self [is] neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves’ (1993 [1927]: 71); and on a grand scale there is the portfolio of selves, or seventy-odd ‘heteronyms’ invented by Portuguese poet, writer, and translator Fernando Pessoa, whose unfinished, fragmentary lifetime project *Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Disquiet*, 1982) is the embodiment of the imaginative life as endless *flânerie* (wandering). Pessoa’s labour on the fusion of art and life can be aligned with other such projects, for instance Mallarmé’s *Grand Oeuvre*, his proposed ‘transposition of the world into the Book’, which, as he put it, would be ‘like God: necessary, present, inexistent’ (Roberts 2011: 133, 135). Other examples include monumental attempts at capturing the full plenitude of the past through memory, such as Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913–27), and Joyce’s at once panoramic and microscopic Ur-story of human languages and comic falls and risings in *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Between Proust’s intimate and Joyce’s international visions lie equally ambitious attempts to render the full scope of human experience in the dynamic, and often

explosive, present of twentieth-century modernity. At once buoyed and beset by the accelerating energies of social mobility, new technologies of artistic reproduction, and the increased visibility (and demands) of a ‘pushing world’, as W. B. Yeats put it (2007 [1916]: 165), European modernists of the early part of the century explored the limits of lyrical and narrative subjectivity. For the protagonist of *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), the partly autobiographical novel by the Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke set in Paris – the modernist metropolis par excellence – being in the world is tantamount to ‘learning to see’ anew: ‘I possess an inner self of which I was ignorant. Everything now passes in thither. What happens there I know not’ (Rilke 1984: 5). Malte’s ‘passion for the real’ (Badiou 2007: 32) generates a sense of estrangement from the world of social and psychological belonging, no longer anchored in the familial and cultural certainties of the past, and a tension between the actuality of all things present and available to the desiring modern artist and the invisible ‘images imprisoned within’ (Rilke, qtd. in Nicholls 1995: 140).⁷ This ambivalent, often elegiac, embrace of the ‘here and now’ of modernity established a literary idiom of interiority as a ‘struggle between personal and social life’, an apt subject for the ‘thinking individual’, according to Valéry (1919b: 280), but also the need to ‘do some of the neglected things’, if ‘we [are not to] remain on the surface of life’, as Malte/Rilke puts it in the *Notebook* (1984: 22–3).

The notion of a deeper layer of human existence, not readily accessible to the (over-stimulated) modern eye but forever troubling the surface of life, resonates with the findings of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, whose ‘discovery’ of the unconscious and analysis of individual and collective instinctual life provided a new vocabulary for the exploration of the crisis of European subjectivity. As the German sociologists Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer put it in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1944), their account of the violent regression of European rationality, ‘Europe has two histories: a well-known, written history and an underground history. The latter consists in the fate of the human instincts and passions which are displaced and distorted by civilization’ (1979: 231). The critique of ‘civilization’ as the legacy and legitimizing discourse of imperial pursuits abroad, and ossified social divisions within, marked the European twentieth century and its literary modernisms. It expressed itself in direct attacks on the paternalism of aristocratic and religious values, as well as the official and too often virulent nationalisms of bourgeois states.

Freud’s diagnosis of an Oedipal drama acted out on that underground stage of mental life, along with the recognition of the persistence of ‘primitive’ forces driving the ‘civilized’ world of modernity, became a telling trope for artists engaged in such attacks. For the European avant-gardes of the 1910s and 1920s (German expressionism, Italian and Russian futurism, English vorticism, Zürich and Berlin dada, French surrealism – to name but those with literary strands), the prospect of the future and its new order was in the hands of rebellious sons and liberated daughters. Their at times united, at times segregated, projects of destruction of the old ‘mental Europe’ harnessed the savage energies of irrationality, sexuality, the machine, and the speed and simultaneity of everyday life in the modern city. This vanguard assault generated new forms: the concrete *Calligrammes* of French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire, the sound poetry of Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and German dadaists Kurt Schwitters and Richard Huelsenbeck, the

simultaneous poems by Romanian-French dadaist Tristan Tzara, the Ur-language works by Berlin poet and playwright Else Lasker-Schüler, *Zaum*, the 'transrational language' experiments of Russian futurist poets Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, and the collaborative automatic writing of French surrealists.

Oedipal dramas abound too in the representation of emerging oppositional forces that question or radically undermine the surface stability of established order in works by European prose writers such as the Russian Andrei Bely, whose one-day city novel *Petersburg* (1913; rev. 1922) follows the actions of a young revolutionary tasked with the assassination of his father, a Tsarist official, or the German Alfred Döblin, whose *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), told from multiple points of view and employing montage and sound effects, maps the dangerous underworld of the capital of the Weimar Republic. Robert Musil's unfinished *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*, 1930–43) and *Die Schlafwandler* (*The Sleepwalkers*, 1931–2) by fellow Austrian Hermann Broch, are both sweeping, forensic analyses of a world 'going to pieces' (Arendt 1949: 477), or of the clashing sensibilities and fortunes of the sons and fathers of empire played out in Vienna, that 'metropolis of the ethical vacuum', as Broch put it (qtd. in Arendt 1968: 115). A deeply, often violently anti-authoritarian vision of the world and its strictures was recorded by German-speaking Czech writer Franz Kafka in stories of radical alienation and graphic mutation into inhumanity, such as 'Das Urteil' ('The Judgement', 1912) and 'Die Verwandlung' ('The Metamorphosis', 1915). Kafka's many short 'parables' or self-contained mini-trials of shared knowledge and his chillingly precise rendition of the minutiae of legal and bureaucratic reasoning in tales such 'In der Strafkolonie' ('In the Penal Colony', 1919) and the novel *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1914–15; pub. 1925) resist metaphysical interpretation and seem to scrutinize instead the mind's fraught access to the real through language. The literal disappearance act of the caged 'hunger artist' in Kafka's eponymous story 'Ein Hungerkünstler' (1922) is in that sense both the materialization of a pun and a punishment by the mind on the suffering body. Thomas Mann's sustained explorations of the role of art in the formation of tragic sensibilities also feature failing bodies, as well as the psychic and mental passions of desiring figures never fully in sync with their time. Influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of modernity and his invocation of the Dionysian-Apollonian duality troubling human self-understanding since the time of the Greek tragedians, though ambivalent about the implications of Nietzsche's thought,⁸ the German novelist and Nobel-prize laureate produced studies of incomplete aesthetic sublimation in works such as the novellas *Tristan* (1903) and *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912), and a multi-perspectival representation of the ecstatic experience of death in life, or health through illness, in the reclusive, but all too human, microcosm of a Swiss sanatorium in the novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924). Mann's writing was also energized by the spectre of fascism and the pernicious, hypnotizing effects of its rhetoric, which he criticized in the novella *Mario und der Zauberer* (*Mario and the Magician*, 1929), a parodic parable of crowd manipulation by a grotesque entertainer.

Fascist domination, from the Nazi rise to power in 1933 to the defeat of the Spanish Republic in 1939 and subsequent invasions of most of continental Europe, was a confirmation of Mann's (and other European writers') prescient sightings of a returning nightmare. In the catastrophic years that followed, literary Europe was

mobilized in movements of resistance, but also in a new wave of forced migration and exile. Contemplations of disaster, and of a terminal crisis of the human spirit, bookend the history of European literature, but in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War the vision of a civilization in ruins posed a seemingly insurmountable challenge to modern writers.⁹ One of the most emblematic responses to that challenge was Hermann Broch's novel *Der Tod des Vergil* (*The Death of Virgil*, 1945), begun in 1938 in a concentration camp and completed in the United States. Imagining the last hours in the life of the Roman poet and his decision to burn his *Aeneid*, the epic story of European origins, Broch's extraordinary lyrical monologue ponders the impossible 'homecoming into the human' (2000 [1945]: 209), in another, more melancholic and final instance of the 'fierce and fatal struggle' in which literature in Europe was engaged (Eliot 1919: 681).

NOTES

1. I borrow the term from Miguel de Unamuno's diatribe against 'Europeanization' ('Sobre la europeización' ['On Europeanization']), first published in the Madrid review *La España moderna* (216, December 1906, 64–83). For Unamuno, the double imperative facing his contemporaries, namely of becoming 'European' and 'modern', would only lead to a 'sterile hybridism' ['un hórrido mestizaje espiritual, casi un hibridismo infecundo'] (77). For context and discussion, see Silverman.
2. For a discussion of modernism's 'centripetal' force fields and an overview of the critical reorientations provided by the 'new modernist studies', see Wollaeger.
3. On the multiple 'crises' of literary Europe, see Lewis.
4. For a survey of symbolism's international reach, see Balakian.
5. For an overview, see Weir.
6. Verlaine went on to include three more 'accursed' figures in a new edition in 1888, namely Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the early nineteenth-century poet and actress Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and himself, appearing under the pseudonym-anagram of his name 'Pauvre Lelian'.
7. See Rilke's 1914 poem 'Turning Point': 'Work of the eyes is done, now/go and do heart-work/on all the images imprisoned within you; for you/overpowered them: but even now you don't know them' (qtd. in Nicholls 1995: 140).
8. For a discussion of that relationship and the twentieth-century afterlife of Nietzsche's thought, see Behler.
9. For an overview, see Arendt 1968.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

MODERNISM IN EUROPEAN MUSIC



Stephen Downes

If European modernism can be identified with an intensified erosion of the authority of traditional beliefs and institutions, anxieties over subjective and collective identities – particularly as raised by the sense of alienation from ‘nature’ through forces of industrialization and bureaucratization – and a heightened artistic search for the new in response to these conditions, then there is strong consensus that European musical modernism emerges sometime in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, music was widely popular as model and inspiration for modernists across a range of artistic fields during this period. The essays of Charles Baudelaire, Thomas Mann, and Friedrich Nietzsche about Richard Wagner are amongst the most famous examples. Music’s apparently ineffable, abstract, or absolute quality (chose your favoured designator of ultimate profundity) and sensuous immediacy (the ecstasy of the exquisite moment) were central stimuli for, amongst others, the Wagnerism of the Parisian symbolists, the decadence of the Russian ‘Silver Age’, and the eroticism of the Viennese fin-de-siècle.¹

The music of the decades around 1900 is often identified as the first full flourishing of musical modernism because of its semantic depth (Dahlhaus 1989), syntactic complexity (Morgan 1984), and formal novelties (Hepokoski 1993). Daniel Albright’s definition (2004) of modernism as a testing of the limits of aesthetic construction (and his comment that this is what creates the strangeness, stridency, and exhilaration of modernist art) fits well not only with much repertory from the 1890–1914 period, but also with the music of what might be called the second wave of modernism in music after the Second World War, in which composers such as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Olivier Messiaen, and Luigi Nono developed radical and complex compositional systems and styles of uncompromising avant-garde ambition (see Albright 2004: 11). Few if any of these characteristics were completely new, however; most were freighted with fraught relationships to history. The provocative or transgressive characteristics of modernism can also inform music which delights in the play of a sensuous immediacy, or deploys an apparently ‘easier’ idiom, less esoteric because familiar features are more immediately obvious (but frequently only so that the effect turns, discomfortingly or just plain amusingly, to the parodic or the ironic), or because it overtly adheres, or alludes to, diatonic tonality or straightforward formal designs.

An ideological geography of musical modernism has commonly been constructed on the ‘centrality’ of the Austro-German (largely Viennese) and French (totally Parisian) traditions around which the modernisms of Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Britain, and the Mediterranean are peripherally arrayed.² But even within the long-established centres our understanding of the characters and figures of musical modernism have been recently revised. In Vienna, Arnold Schoenberg dominates the conventional narrative, reinforced by the phrase ‘Second Viennese School’ (Schoenberg and his pupils, Alban Berg and Anton Webern), with figures such as Gustav Mahler and Franz Schreker marginalized, implicitly ‘unschooled’. Mahler’s modernist credentials have long been debated. His stylistic pluralism challenges Schoenberg’s ‘organic’ modernism, a challenge also raised by the sensuous extravagance and provocative stylistic license of Schreker’s opera *Der ferne Klang* (1910) (Hailey 2002). By contrast, Schoenberg’s pursuit of techniques extending from Wagner and Johannes Brahms can seem surprisingly orthodox.³

This raises the wider question of which composers belong to the modernist collective. Recently, Paul Harper-Scott has argued that we must not simply expand the controlling rule of the centre in a kind of modernist imperialism. Rather, we must redefine modernism through invoking a dialectic between ‘faithful’ and ‘reactive’ modernists, with the latter proposing a conservatively couched response (one might call it the revaluation of consonance) which furthers the ‘truth’ of the modernist event (the emancipation of dissonance), because it is contingent and conditioned by that truth. This response is marked, even haunted, by the modernist event in its absence or negation. There are many variants of this reactive modernism (anxious, pessimistic, comic and so on) and the dialectic can operate within a single work, so that William Walton’s First Symphony (1935), for example, can be heard to trace the composer’s move from faithful to reactive modernism, ending with a perfect cadence, the very model of conventional musical closure, but one which sounds highly self-conscious (Harper-Scott 2012). Indeed, comparing and contrasting compositional negotiations with how to begin, to continue, and to end is a very useful way to focus an overview of musical modernism.⁴

BEGINNINGS

In the beginning was the end. In his *The Decline of the West* (1918, 1922) Oswald Spengler, inspired by Baudelaire, makes a comparison between Wagner and Edouard Manet to argue that ‘the end and the culmination of art was the conjuring up of a world in space out of strokes and patches of colour’ (Spengler 1932: 291–3) Wagner achieved this in the concentrated tone ‘painting’ exemplified by the first three bars of *Tristan and Isolde* (1859). But for Spengler this was a decadent miniaturism; he concludes: ‘As a step, it is necessarily the last step’; it is ‘an artificial art’, it ‘has no further organic future, it is the mark of the end’ (1932: 364). Thus, music practiced ‘after Wagner’ declines into ‘impotence and falsehood’ (364). We need not, of course, share Spengler’s pessimism concerning music after Wagner, but the generation most commonly identified as the ‘early modernists’ was, as Dahlhaus notes, ‘virtually held in thrall to the harmonic consequences of *Tristan*’ (Dahlhaus 1989: 315). Thrall turns easily to anxiety. Wagner functions in the twentieth century as a ‘cultural trope’ (Kramer 2004: 110), as an authoritative, symbolic figure which assumes, in certain

modern works a ‘disconcerting ambiguity’ as a persistently haunting relic of the past century (112). After 1908 Schoenberg seemed to tear apart post-Wagnerianism in favour of expressionistic directness. For Theodor Adorno (Schoenberg’s most influential philosopher-disciple) the absence of decoration or simulation of passions and the undisguised registering of shock and trauma confirmed the modern authenticity of Schoenberg’s monodrama *Erwartung* (1909) and the Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11 (1909) (Adorno 2006 [1949]).⁵ But the opening of the latter suggests that the ‘scars’ of Tristan’s wounds remain a source of agony in Schoenberg’s masochistic modernism. It is a limping waltz moving through chromatic motions which rise and droop in counterpoint of overtly Wagnerian provenance.

The intoxicating, sensuous particularities of Wagner’s *Tristan* led Nietzsche to proclaim Wagner as the greatest of modern decadent artists. For symbolists in 1880s Paris, Wagner’s music – especially the late style of *Tristan* and *Parsifal* – became the great model of enigmatic, inscrutable artistic beauty. The place of Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (1892–4) on the cusp of modernity can be identified in his self-conscious use of Wagnerian materials in seductive and esoteric syntax. Debussy’s gossamer textures sound far removed from Wagner’s *Tristan*, but the legacy becomes clear when the openings are compared. In both, the beauty of tiny chromatic motives and carefully placed ambiguous chords are central to the technique and aesthetic. They even share the silence which follows, which might be a manifestation of the ‘negative aesthetic’ prevalent within modernism – the failure of style to reach the Idea, to represent the absolute beautiful form (Goehr 2001).

There was also an overtly, and often aggressively, ‘anti-*Tristan*’ thread in musical modernism. In the 1920s anti-Wagnerian modernism flourished (alongside those who equally vehemently pursued post-Wagnerian aims). In the opening of Kurt Weill’s Violin Concerto (1925) a melodic rise and fall is accompanied by a complex chord in a manner recalling *Tristan*. But, militarized or dehumanized by a drum roll, this chord is then immediately repeated. Weill’s chord is denied the sensuous uniqueness of identity through ‘mechanical’ reproduction (to invoke Walter Benjamin) which deprives it of its ‘original’, enchanted quality. Allusions to the opening of *Tristan* can also be heard in the first number of the Weill-Brecht collaboration, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930). Bertolt Brecht famously pointed to the ‘culinary character’ of opera, its function as a hedonistic means of gaining passing pleasurable experience. For Brecht, the post-Wagnerians offered mere sensual satisfaction: although *Mahagonny* is ‘culinary through and through’, it *is* opera and brings this character under critical scrutiny (Brecht 1964 [1930]). Adorno identified *Mahagonny* as ‘the first surrealist opera’ (Adorno 2009 [1930]: 195) in which ironic and ludic montages admit the pleasures of the sensuous as part of a socially ‘truthful’, modern artwork.

For Richard Taruskin, the musical twentieth century began with the first performance of Igor Stravinsky’s Octet for wind instruments on 18 October 1923 because it marked the break from nineteenth century aesthetics. In the guise of eighteenth-century pastiche the shock is of the old gone awry in a piece of self-conscious artifice and ironic insincerity. A sense of this is found in some works from the expressionist phrase such as the atonal cabaret (by turns deranged and macabre, clever-clever, and ironic) of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* (1912). After the obliteration of old hopes and longings by the First World War, the ironists, cynics, and hedonists

had their moment in the sun. Stravinsky's opening phrases may evoke the courtly and courteous charm of eighteenth-century models, but nothing can now be heard innocently: the classical elements are masks posing a fake decorum in the face of contemporary anxieties (Taruskin 2005: 478–9). The 'neo' in neoclassical signifies this distance, detachment, and difference. Stravinsky's archly archaic machinations allude to classical formal principles, but these are not heard as 'authentic' because they seem to lack traditional motivation and connection. In a final twist in the tale, Taruskin hears the Bachian figurations of the finale move to the syncopations of American dance music. All this dancing to the music of multiple past and present times quickly became terribly chic.

By contrast with Stravinsky's urbane sophistication, Béla Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1924) opens with the brutal sounds of the modern metropolis. It is a ferocious example of the 'constructed' sublime, but also of the grotesque, the deformation of 'natural' forms. It can be powerfully compared with the dawn music from Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe* (1912). By contrast with Ravel's fake birdsong, which evokes a beautiful, regenerative idyll, Bartók challenges the traditional boundary between music and noise (a distinction more radically contested by the 'art of noise' proposed by the futurist Luigi Russolo, certain scores by Edgard Varèse and, after the Second World War, the electronic montages of Pierre Schaeffer's '*musique concrète*').

In Britain a strong reaction to the First World War was to look back nostalgically to pastoral traditions. This has strong but ambivalent echoes in Benjamin Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and string orchestra*, Op. 31 (1943). The natural harmonics of the French horn in the prologue suggest a distant, archaic pastoral, and the intruding dissonances the contrasting sounds of the modern world. Modernist primitivism coexists with a strong commitment to tradition. Tension lies between conservative nostalgia and radical critique, between the comforting and the disquieting.

MIDDLES

In the expressionistic aphorisms of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, or the decadent miniatures of Alexander Scriabin, beginning, middle and end seem condensed into a single, intense gesture. Scriabin offers a sensuous caress or occult secret in a teasing moment; the Viennese expressionists, by contrast, a grimace, a musical couching of the troubled psyche. But the attractions of the grand, extended statement remained. In longer works Scriabin turned to the sonata form principle, raising the paradox of pitch novelties in traditional forms. Schoenberg repeatedly struggled to complete longer atonal works in free form. The development of 12-note serialism as the ordered source of all pitch materials coincided with a return to traditional musical forms (e.g. Suite, Op. 25, 1923; Third String Quartet, Op. 30, 1927; Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, 1928). The coexistence of radicalism and traditionalism is especially notable in Berg's serially provocative operas, *Wozzeck* (1922) and *Lulu* (incomplete at the composer's death in 1935), where there is often a sense of traditional forms compensating for traumatic chaos.

Musical invocations of expressionism and primitivism (including the 'real' folk music in, for example, Bartók and Leoš Janáček) are manifestations of the modernist

anxiety over artistic ‘authenticity’. This also drives the emancipation from false totalities promised by unruly particulars which negate or ridicule the rule of traditional powers of organization (Chua 2007). The famous chord in ‘The Augurs of Spring’ from Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (1913) has deliberate shock value. Its insistent repetitions in irregular rhythmic groupings generate a propulsive and convulsive character, in which rhythm is emancipated from traditional obligations. Juxtaposition rather than resolution (however long delayed) is the procedural manner. The chord seems ‘polytonal’ (a superimposition of E ♭ and F ♭ triads), but these triads possess no tonal function. ‘Poly’ usefully suggests subversive pluralism, dissonant coexistence, a negation of the singular focus of diatonic tonality. The chord is a stratified point of convergence of conflicting systems that move through moments of diffusion, confusion, and fusion.

Ernst Křenek identified the provocative use of familiar materials in Mahler’s music as anticipating the techniques and temporality of musical surrealism. Křenek points to a tendency in Mahler towards musical montages in which deformations of the obsolete or banal are joined in disturbing combinations. In movements such as the scherzo from the Seventh Symphony (1905) there is frequently an ambiguous temporal character in which proto-surrealist fragmentations coexist or compete with large-scale, teleological progressions. The effect of such combinations can range from the grandiose to the grotesque. The results range from derisory ridicule through ironic ambiguity to profound existential doubt.

The question of sincerity was especially prominent in French cultural discourse between 1890 and 1930 (Caballero 2001: 11–56). In a milieu of bewildering stylistic diversity, scrutiny of the relationship between compositional choice and artistic personality became intense. An ideal ‘translation’ between the two was recognized in practice as neither possible nor desirable. Maurice Ravel, who delighted in musical masks, irony, and artifice, strongly espoused a negation of sincerity. Arguably, Ravel’s pronouncements were so vehement because music seemed most resistant to such critique on account of its privileged position in romanticism as an abstract medium directly expressive of inwardness. Jean Cocteau’s *Le coq et l’arlequin* (1918) famously debunked these late romantic views, as he urged artists to cease contemplating their inner navel and get out more: enough reverie, get real. By contrast with the portentousness or pretentiousness of the aphorisms of Schoenberg and Scriabin, the apparently childish pieces of Cocteau’s allies, Erik Satie, and Francis Poulenc, cock a snook at artistic claims to the exceptional or ineffable and prick the aesthetic pomposity of the musical snob. The utter simplicity of Satie’s ‘white’ music suggests a melancholy absence, a hole in the middle; his *musique d’ameublement* (‘furniture music’), designed to be ignored, doodles aimlessly in the mundane spaces of ordinary life.

ENDINGS

The end of Wagner’s *Tristan* is impossible. Or so it seemed to many who remained unconvinced, or even repelled, by the ecstatic force of closure performed by Isolde’s *Verklärung*. The B major section towards the end of Richard Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1895–6) evokes the redemption of Wagner’s lovers but only, through unresolved dissonance, to affirm the Nietzschean, all-too-human revolt.⁶ This

reflects Strauss's enthusiasm for anarchistic, individual liberalism in the 1890s and Nietzsche's post-metaphysical revaluation of values. In *Till Eulenspiegel* (1894–5) Strauss emphasizes surface material sensation; the orchestra is celebrated as a visible, virtuosic musical machine, as music 'technology'. Metaphysics are thrown out the window.

The problem of ending became more widely acute. When, at the very end of Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* (1895) the orchestra replays, in full throat, the first eight bars of Mimì's aria 'Sono andante?', this might be dismissed as cheap emotionalism at a fatal moment. But it is a device for framing the traumatic event and restoring, or repairing musical order. The tension between formal demands and the forces of breakdown and disruption exemplifies the problems of *verismo*, the fleetingly dominant aesthetic of the 'truth' in Italian opera, in which the shock of the real can have the force to 'punch a hole' through traditional forms (Dahlhaus 1985: 52–3). The closing theme might sound like final reparation, but there can also be a more pessimistic reading, that in *La bohème*, 'we enter a post-romantic, modern world without transcendence' in which the pervasive sense is one of loss (Groos and Parker 1986: 78).

The endings of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908) and Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (1912) are comparable visions of post-Wagnerian redemption evoking the cycles of death and renewal. Mahler's 'ewig' and Schoenberg's sunrise are both C major triads with an added sixth (A) and hence suggestive of the pentatonic (a traditional symbol of nature), bitonal synthesis (A minor and C major), and the 'hopeful' major sixth. Berg's Violin Concerto (1935), with its final G minor / B ♭ major 'added sixth' chord, is more ambiguously concluded (Karnes 2013). Berg's lingering, nostalgic glance back to Vienna's *fin-de-siècle* utopianism is markedly in contrast with the momentary retrieval of something lyrical amongst the mechanistic horrors in the final pages of Ravel's *La valse* (1920). As the work hurtles towards catastrophic collapse, Ravel inserts an expressive fragment which suggests the shudder of Proustian involuntary memory (Puri 2011).

The heated debate over whether the end of Dmitri Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony (1937) is affirmative or ironic has been fuelled by the circumstances of its composition in the darkest days of Stalinism. But there is a wider context of 'endings' in the modernist inter-war symphony in which composers sought alternatives to post-romantic synthesis or apotheosis. In Carl Nielsen's Fifth Symphony (1920–2), for example, closure seems produced through collision of materials rather than teleological process. Its simplicity provocatively challenges the modernist orthodoxy that values protracted complexity over directness (Grimley 2011). The Fourth Symphony (1935) of Vaughan Williams sends deliberately mixed messages. As Harper-Scott puts it, it is initially 'modernist-feinting' but 'ultimately rather classicizing': in the end the 'stern "modernist" mask' is removed to 'reveal a roguish grin beneath' (179). The grotesque is deployed to disguise and to parody both classical and modernist expectations. The cyclic return of the biting dissonant opening is 'explosive' yet also serves to 'clinch the entire symphony's design', through which the modernist anguish exposed in the symphony's opening statement is discharged (Harper-Scott 2010: 195). In the end is the beginning.

ANOTHER BEGINNING; OR IS THERE NO END (YET)?

After the Second World War a heated debate developed between those advocating radical notions of innovative cultural advancement and those supporting conservative reconstruction. For the former, the new was often sought in neo-serialism, with its promise of abstraction and athenaticism. A move to extreme structural rigour allied to the rejection of romantic expression emerged from analysis of the music of Webern at the famous Darmstadt seminars (see Grant 2001). Works by Boulez (e.g. *Structures 1a*, 1952; *Le marteau sans maître*, 1955) and Karlheinz Stockhausen (e.g. *Gesänge der Jünglinge* for electronic tape, 1956; *Gruppen* for three orchestras, 1957) were the headliners. And in full *agent provocateur* mode Boulez pursued the headlines when he notoriously declared that ‘Schoenberg is Dead’ (1952) (that is, ‘dead’ as a musical influence) and that the opera houses be razed to the ground.⁷

But by the mid-1950s accusations of musical totalitarianism in the predetermined, masterful control systems of the new serialism were being voiced. In his influential essay ‘The Ageing of New Music’ (Adorno 2002 [1955]) Adorno attacked the pursuit of apparently neutral musical material and ‘abstract negation’ for excluding the subjective doubts and anxieties that he heard in the expressionism of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. Adorno allied this music’s subjective freedom and expressive complexity with its dialectical relationship with the past. He raised Berg’s Violin Concerto to demonstrate that ‘things that are modern do not just sally forth in advance of their time. They also recall things forgotten: they control the anachronistic reserves which have been left behind and which have not yet been exhausted’ (Adorno 1992 [1960]: 216). At this point Adorno might have repeated his convictions about the modernist authenticity of Mahler. But the Mahler renaissance following the centenary of his birth in 1960 was in strong part sustained by Mahler’s ‘postmodern’ credentials, based on the erosion of hierarchy and history in his montages of ‘high’ and ‘low’, and old and new, materials. (The ‘polystylistics’ of Alfred Schnittke and the third movement of Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia* [1969] illustrate this way of hearing Mahler.) An alternative view would be that Mahler merely demonstrates that most of what is attributed to postmodernism may be found in earlier modernism.

The end of modernism in this way seems premature. A ‘late’ musical modernity has been identified in a turn, in the years around 1980, to the expressive and technical preoccupations of the early twentieth century, manifest, for example, in the laments of György Ligeti, the fragments of György Kurtág, the spectralist sonorities of Kaija Saariaho, the density of Brian Ferneyhough’s ‘new complexity’, the expressionism of Helmut Lachenmann (Metzer 2009; see also Williams 1997). The emphasis on expressive communication marks a striking difference to the inscrutable modernism of the post-Second World War period. If Wolfgang Rihm sustains a critical distance from traditional forms of expression which seems absent in the neo-Romanticism of, say, Krzysztof Penderecki’s Third Symphony (1988), then it should be noted that the latter’s *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) aimed for direct expression through a stylistic appropriation (this time of the textural techniques of the avant-garde). Even notoriously systematic works, such as Boulez’s *Structures 1a*, can be heard to have expressive, dare one say pleasurable, qualities (see Ashby 2010). Musical modernism continues to resist simple definitions just as its history remains unfinished.

NOTES

1. On music and modernism in other arts see, for example, de Mille, Koss, Frisch, Albright (2000), and Watkins.
2. For discussions of musical modernism in some of these ‘peripheries’, see Downes, Earle, Frigyesi, Grimley, Haas, Hess, Hooker, and Riley.
3. On France, see Nichols and Kelly.
4. On temporality and musical modernism, see Berger. Other useful foci could be musical modernism and technology, political institutions, and so on.
5. On musical expressionism more widely, see Crawford and Dorothy.
6. See Youmans.
7. In the 1970s Boulez held immense institutional power as head of the avant-garde IRCAM, Paris’s troglodytically inverted ivory tower (see Born).

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

MODERNISM AND EUROPEAN DRAMA/THEATRE

—♦—
Claire Warden

In 1912 Edith Craig's British feminist theatre group the Pioneer Players performed a version of Irish George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, a play about prostitution and the rise of the 'new woman'. Responding to the subject matter, some members resigned from the company in moral outrage (Eltis 2013: 163). Eight years later the self-proclaimed dadaist group appeared in Paris where its Romanian leader Tristan Tzara was due to speak for the first time. After a selection of bewildering poems, musical performances, and rude art from figures such as Francis Picabia, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, and Erik Satie, Tzara got up to speak only to be drowned out by offstage bell-ringers. The audience finally lost its temper crying 'Enough, Enough!' (Melzer 1994: 6). Why begin with these two examples? Certainly they appear to have little common ground aesthetically, thematically or geographically. Yet they set up the central themes of our enquiry; European modernist theatre is an extraordinarily diverse collection of performance happenings, some script-based, others rejecting language altogether, some almost educational, others virtually impossible to decipher in a reasoned manner, some maintaining a linear story, others fragmenting narrative by including different art forms such as music, dance or poetry. Appearing in different geographical locations (with personnel frequently moving between these locations often due to war or the rise of authoritarian regimes), modernist performance in Europe defies easy demarcation and can be defined only by the broad sense of antagonism suggested by these two initial examples.

In many ways, modernist theatrical performance in Europe exemplifies many of the central concerns of modernism more generally (industrialisation, social unrest, scientific advancement, war, political extremism) and has a fascinating genealogy. Even using the word 'genealogy', however, insinuates false linearity. As Kirsten Shepherd-Barr puts it 'the history of modernism on stage is a history of sudden arrivals and radical departures; of catastrophism rather than Darwinian gradualism' (Shepherd-Barr 2010: 132). As with many modernist artistic movements across the globe, the beginnings of modernist performance are contested. Did it originate with German Gerhart Hauptmann's 1892 *The Weavers*, surely the first play to really grapple with the conventions of naturalism and successfully theatricalize a political event (an 1844 abortive weavers' rebellion)? Or perhaps with Shaw, Elizabeth Robins

(American-born though did most of her work in the UK), or Norwegian Henrik Ibsen's naturalistic dramas, placing themes like venereal disease, prostitution, women's rights, and abortion on the stage? Or perhaps with Russian Anton Chekhov's symbolist-inflected naturalism? Or maybe it all began with Frenchman Alfred Jarry's 1896 *Ubu Roi*, the scandalously scatological precursor to the dadaists and surrealists? Indeed, even to talk about origin points is problematic as many European theatre practitioners looked considerably further back than the mid nineteenth-century (see, for example, T. S. Eliot's use of Greek motif in *Sweeney Agonistes* [1933], Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold's admiration of *commedia dell'arte*, or Frenchman André Obey's reworking of Biblical stories in *Noah* [1930]) while, at the same time, often rejecting the past in favour of the new. Constructivist stage designer and artist Lyubov Popova was not alone in rejecting historical origin points entirely when she exclaimed 'the past is for history. The present and the future are for organizing life' (Danchev 2011: 195).

While later movements rejected naturalism, it is certainly wise to start with it as it represents a sharp turn in theatre making: a revolutionary reappraisal of the stage. Taking his lead from the novel, French playwright Émile Zola saw naturalism's potential for the theatre, decisively moving away from the dull set patterns of the well-made play or the commercial entertainment of the music hall. Naturalism aimed to present authentic lived existence on the stage. As Zola put it 'the truth does not need clothing; it can walk naked' (Zola 1968: 362). This meant doing 'great things with the subjects and characters that our eyes, accustomed to the spectacle of the daily round, have come to see as small' (1968: 364). However, naturalism was not merely a focus on the real, but was prompted by very specific nineteenth-century developments: the rise of the city, the dominance of the middle classes, the polluted riches of industrialisation, the economic divisions of society, and the scientific advancements of Darwin and his ilk. All these elements manifest in the unwavering focus on material existence rather than the spiritual, metaphysical, or escapist as well as the scientific approach of playwrights who dissected their characters and scenario. Many playwrights took up this naturalist challenge with Ibsen's analysis of Norwegian middle-class life (often read as an investigation of gender politics) in *A Doll's House* (1879), Robin's presentation of the struggle for women's suffrage in *Votes for Women* (1907), and John Galsworthy's analysis of the prison system in *Justice* (1910).

Designers, directors, and actors also aimed for naturalistic performances, using sets that seemed to be real factories or streets and acting styles that explored the full intricacies of character. Konstantin Stanislavsky was one such figure. His method focused on emotion memory, a way of tapping into one's own emotions to present a more authentic character on the stage. If the actor had not experienced the character's circumstances then they were to evoke the 'magic if'; that is, imagining how one would really react in any given situation. In attempting to present the real on the stage, Stanislavsky concluded that all the falseness must go:

it must inspire belief in the possibility, in real life, of emotions analogous to those being experienced on the stage by the actor. Each and every moment must be saturated with a belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt, and in the action carried out, by the actor.

(Stanislavsky 1967: 123)

Stanislavsky did not uncritically accept the naturalist project, remaining specific about the sort of naturalism he desired – one rooted not in objective materialism but in the workings of the human mind.

Despite naturalism's revolutionary beginnings, many later performances challenged it. Often these are defined as 'avant-garde' rather than 'modernist' due to their artistic experimentation and spirit of antagonism; although, as Olga Taxidou teaches us, 'relationships between the two camps are more intricate and fraught' (2007: 7). Certainly one could make a strong case for the category 'modernist avant-garde performance' which would bring these diverse performances into some sort of (often complex) dialogue. Symbolism, the first of these movements, questioned naturalism's fixation on the real (as did all the European theatre movements of this period) though it also shares a good deal with naturalism. Both issue from the same impulse to strip theatre back to its essence in order to perform truth. Claude Schumacher even claims that 'naturalism and symbolism are as indissociable as the fingers on one's hand' (1996: 7). Exemplifying the ideas of this new theatrical movement, Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck's plays are infused with a lyrical impenetrability, committed to creating atmosphere and (unsurprisingly) symbols rather than an accurate representation of real speech patterns or characters. Conducting much of his work in Britain, Irishman W. B. Yeats' plays likewise exhibit a peculiar otherworldliness, giving the impression of a dream, combining nationalist politics, Irish folklore, and symbolist experimentation.

The primary difference between naturalism and symbolism then does not lie in their respective intentions to show truth; rather there is a difference in the way they achieved this aim. Nowhere was this clearer than in the collaboration between Stanislavsky and British designer Edward Gordon Craig. The latter's ideas can certainly be read alongside the conventions of symbolism even if the fit is not straightforward. Craig's scenic designs exhibited none of the mimetic realism traditionally seen in the Moscow Arts Theatre. Indeed he despised such 'sham realism': 'a so-called "real" room is what we present on stage today [...] real and yet quite dead – expressionless – unable to act' (Craig 1983: 51). Influenced by Swiss lighting technician Adolphe Appia, Craig stripped the stage back to plain boards and used colour and shadow to suggest scene. This meant Craig's staged visions had none of the specificity of Stanislavsky's drawing rooms, rather 'it has a quite clear resemblance to four hundred different places' (1983: 124). Coupled with this, whereas Stanislavsky's actors worked with emotion memory and the 'magic if' to create accurate portrayals of real people, Craig had little time for the actor at all, advocating an *Übermarionette* (a 'super puppet'): 'the actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure' (1983: 85). Craig and Stanislavsky's 1912 version of *Hamlet* suffered due to these artistic differences, with the former's folding screens falling down in rehearsals and the latter more interested in his protagonist's psychology (Senelick 1981: 110).

Though it is difficult to discern any unifying factor in the various European theatrical '-isms', if we wanted one definable characteristic of avant-garde (largely anti-naturalistic) performance in Europe we could do worse than follow Erika Fischer-Lichte's claim that these artists refused any longer to privilege the text (or script) as many naturalists had done. 'No longer does the text steer, control and legitimize performance,' she suggests. 'Rather the text becomes one material among other materials' (Fischer-Lichte 2000: 80). Indeed this reveals a profound

distrust of (or reassessment of) language that appeared in various guises across modernist culture.

The futurists (with manifestations in Italy and Russia) celebrated the defining characteristics of modernity – the machine, speed, the city – and rejected the old, from established museums to traditional marriage values. This attitude influenced futurist ideas for the theatre, as defined in leader F. T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Synthetic Theater* (written with Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra in 1915). Futurist theatre was to be synthetic, short, and non-naturalistic. It would challenge theatrical technique, tearing apart chronology, linearity and character development (ideas they rejected as 'stupid'), and instead allow its audience to go 'careening through a labyrinth of sensations imprinted with the most exacerbated originality and combined in unpredictable ways' (Rainey, Poggi and Witman 2009: 208). This sensibility led to futurist *serate* (antagonistic performance happenings) and to unusual plays like Umberto Boccioni's *Genius and Culture* or Mina della Pergola's *Fidelity*, the former mocking the fakeries of academia and celebrating the dynamism of the artist, the latter speeding up a relationship so that the transition from devotion to adultery occurs in just a few lines. Futurist sets reflected an obsession with the modern, with designer Enrico Prampolini advocating dynamic performance spaces. His stage lighting provided a sense of movement and, with actors liberated from the confines of mimetic character, performers and set emerged as 'quivering and luminous forms [...] unleashed in dynamic writhings' (2009: 215).

Performed at various locations in Paris in 1920, 'Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement' made such perplexing proclamations as 'DADA exists for nobody' (Tristan Tzara), 'NOTHING, Dada satisfaction' (Paul Eluard) and 'DADA, acknowledging only instinct, condemns explanation in principle' (André Breton) (Danchev 2011: 182, 186, 183). If dada means nothing then dada performance happenings often seemed to be destroying the very foundations of theatre. Dada began in Zurich in 1916 before moving to Berlin and Paris (and developing a stronger political feel) as the First World War ended. The performance happenings were organized (though I use that term advisedly) as cabarets, juxtaposing song, dance, manifesto reading, sketches and moments of utter nonsensical play. Evenings at their Cabaret Voltaire might contain a spoken word poem like Hugo Ball's *Karawane* or chanting and drumming from Richard Huelsenback or a song from Emmy Hennings. Despite its non-objectives, dadaism remains one of the modernist avant-garde's most influential performance styles with Annabelle Melzer suggesting its 'emphasis on process and spontaneity in the creative act released a set of energies which blew the world of performance wide open' (1994: xiv).

Often associated with dadaism yet distinct in intention, surrealism is less destructive than its savage cousin. Indeed the word 'surrealist' was coined in the introduction to Guillaume Apollinaire's 1917 play *The Breasts of Tiresias*. Although he had an ambivalent relationship with theatre, surrealist leader André Breton composed a number of plays including, in 1919, *S'il vous plaît*, a play in four acts, experimenting with Breton's broader notion of automatic writing. This meant that although we understand the words of the play, it is far less easy to understand the meaning. 'The level of frustration at almost-understanding,' according to Annabelle Melzer, 'is far greater than that of not understanding at all' (1994: 176). Associated with surrealism, though not necessarily card-carrying members, were other playwrights such as



Figure 38.1 Tristan Tzara, *The Gas Heart*.
Hekman Digital Archive. © VRI.

Spaniard Gabriel García Lorca and Frenchman Jean Cocteau whose 1930 *The Human Voice* experimented with the telephone on the stage, fragmenting words through a modern machine. Also connected with the surrealist movement was Antonin Artaud whose much misunderstood Theatre of Cruelty (first elucidated in his 1938 *The Theatre and its Double*) has provided a blueprint for many contemporary performers. Rejecting language almost altogether, Artaud's plays (*A Spurt of Blood* [1925] and *Cenci* [1935]) are odd, gruesome outworkings of his central ideas. Like the naturalists and symbolists, Artaud searched for truth on the stage. However, Artaud's understanding of this differed considerably, certainly from the former, rejecting the theatre's reliance on the written text and instead advocating a visceral, physical imagining of this truth: 'truthful distillation of dreams' (Artaud 2010: 65). 'Created in order to restore an impassioned, convulsive concept of life to the theatre', Artaudian performance might contain disturbing images, fantastical events, and unfathomable nightmarish characters (2010: 88). For audience members these images prove horrifyingly inescapable yet strangely emancipatory as Artaud's techniques release 'the magic freedom of daydreams, only recognizable when imprinted with terror and cruelty' (2010: 61).

If surrealism was predominantly French then expressionism was German. Many playwrights embodied an expressionistic style visually captured in Norwegian Edvard Munch's 1895 painting *The Scream*: the lone figure, disconnected from the couple behind him, tormented by his own mind and by the hellish swirling colours of the landscape. The plays of this movement by figures such as Ernst Toller, Ivan Goll, Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Kaiser, all have afflicted protagonists, plagued by a lack of self-worth, the pain of horrific wartime experience, their inability to fit into society or their relationships with others, particularly predatory women! These plays

resist linear narrative, written in ‘pictures’ or ‘stages’ reflecting both the Catholic concept of the Stations of the Cross (they are often referred to as *Stationendrama*) and the fragmented modern world. However, expressionism influenced a range of performance methods too, not least in dance where choreographers such as Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban promoted the ecstatic body of expressionism.¹ Although different in focus (during the 1928 Second Dancers’ Congress in Essen, Wigman rejected ballet, while Laban integrated it with new dance modernism [Santos Newhall 2009: 35]), both advocated physical freedom, challenging aesthetic tradition and the growth in industrial production lines, which subjugated the body.

In Russia, touring agitprop (‘agitational propaganda’) groups, such as the Blue Blouse, moved from town to town, performing sketches and songs outside with the express aim of educating the audience and providing entertainment for the proletariat (Leach 1994: 159–65). Indeed such workers’ theatre companies appeared throughout Europe, desperate either to uphold the Revolution (in Russia) or instigate Revolution (elsewhere). Vsevolod Meyerhold, one of Stanislavsky’s pupils, built on this liberation from established theatre buildings, rebelling against the mimetic realism of his teacher. Working alongside artists such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and Lyubov Popova, and in (not always friendly) parallel with others such as Alexander Tairov and Evgeny Vakhtangov, Meyerhold created constructivist theatre. He dismantled all props and sets to reveal bare boards where Rodchenko and Popova rebuilt structures that resembled stylised factories or playground climbing-frames. Performances were overtly political in focus, encouraging solidarity and Communist values as well as entertaining the audience. Meyerhold’s constructivist sets, such as the one designed for his 1922 version of Ferdinand Crommelynck’s *The Magnanimous Cuckold* included slides, steps, levels, and a moving wheel symbolizing a windmill.

Meyerhold’s sets posed a problem for the actor. One could not hark back to Stanislavsky’s emotion memory on a non-mimetic stage. So Meyerhold created a system of movement known as biomechanics. Combining gymnastics, dance and *commedia dell’arte*, Meyerhold’s system required intense bodily discipline, tapping into many recent developments in psychology (Ivan Pavlov’s reflex studies) and industry (Frederick Taylor’s efficient assembly lines). The system was constructed as a series of *études*, from ‘Throwing the stone’ to ‘The leap on the chair’ (Pitches 2003: 126), each one deliberately crossing the permeable divide between stage and factory and presenting the revolutionary body as dextrous and strong.

Though many of these ‘-isms’ can appear arbitrary, they at least provide a sense of narrative cohesion. However, other practitioners defied any sense of community or movement. Two such examples are British Wyndham Lewis whose performative prose piece *Enemy of the Stars* (1914) can only really be understood in its own category of Vorticist drama (Vorticism being a short-lived British aesthetic movement) and Polish artist Stanisław Witkiewicz, whose play *The Pragmatists* (1919) was presented at the Elsinor Theatre Warsaw in 1921. Closing after only four performances, it met with a range of responses, most dismissive. Witkiewicz retaliated, claiming

as of now I have lost faith in the value of carrying on any further polemics. I not only have not found any followers, but I cannot even discover a worthy opponent. My plays will certainly not be staged for a long time (and perhaps never).

(1992: 154)

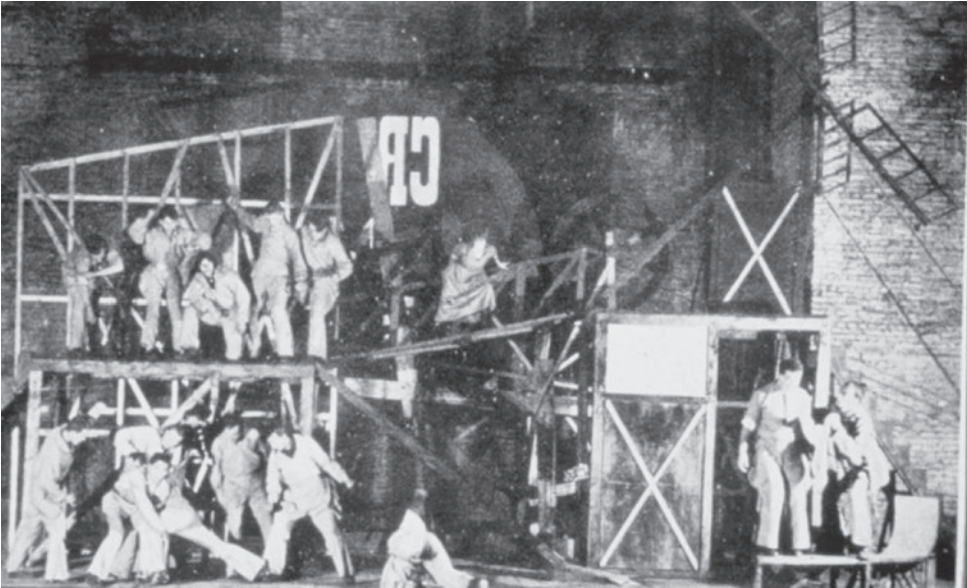


Figure 38.2 Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Magnanimous Cuckold*. Hekman Digital Archive. © VRI.

Compared to all these experimental, often improvisational manifestations of modernist avant-garde performance, late modernist theatre in Europe can appear a little staid, returning to the written playtext. Yet the questioning of language remains. German Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre – 'pleasurable learning' (Brecht 2001: 73) – rested on 'alienating the familiar' (2001: 192); that is, compelling the audience to notice social hierarchies, inequalities and power struggles through the *Verfremdungseffekt* techniques he developed, including 'made strange' acting styles, revealing character through *gestus* (physical gesture hinting at a political message) and structuring his plays as episodes to be 'knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed' (2001: 201). Various artistic elements (music, dance, dialogue, *mise en scène*), which Richard Wagner had earlier claimed should merge together in a *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('total work of art'), existed independently in Brecht's theatre, often interrupting one another. Even drawing attention to the rehearsal process, Brecht's theatre contained none of the illusory mimesis of naturalism, which he rejected as lulling the audience into a state of sleepy acquiescence. Brecht worked out his ideas in his anti-war play *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), his version of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), and his satirical critiques of Nazi Germany like *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* (1938) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941).

The plays of Jean Genet (French), Samuel Beckett (Irish though lived in Paris) and Eugène Ionesco (Romanian) have been (not altogether successfully) united under Martin Esslin's banner, 'Theatre of the Absurd', which like earlier avant-garde theatrical experiments, reflected prevailing attitudes and events: a doubting of metanarratives, a shattering war, and a mistrust of reason (Esslin 1972: 23). These plays expressed the *Zeitgeist* by evincing the 'senselessness of the human condition' and the 'inadequacy of the rational approach' (1972: 24). In rejecting logic, Theatre

of the Absurd is often profoundly comic but, in revealing a frightening purposelessness, is also terrifyingly tragic. In many ways dream-like events like the transformation of man into Rhinoceros or the waiting around for the (probably) non-existent Godot hark back to the ideas of the dadaists and surrealists.

Here we have a remarkably diverse array of performance-making techniques and intentions. Is there anything that unites them or enables us to construct a coherent narrative? Scholars have made some useful speculations. Günter Berghaus suggests that the historical avant-garde created ‘autonomous, transient events that attained power and impact from their temporal and physical immediacy’, thereby directly connecting performance with context (Berghaus 2005: 46). Olga Taxidou suggests the embodiment of poetry on the stage (that is the intertwining of body and poetic voice) really defines modernist performance (Taxidou 2007: 79). Martin Puchner, differentiating between modernist and avant-garde performance, prefers to view the latter in terms of theatricality, the practical outworking of ideas and texts on the stage (Puchner 2002: 8). Christopher Innes, on the other hand, rejects the notion that European avant-garde theatre was simply a striving after the new, pointing to primitivism as the defining factor (Innes 1993: 3). This small snapshot of modernist avant-garde theatrical scholarship in Europe illustrates the multiplicity of definition and profound difficulty of interpretation. Attempting to bring all these voices together, we could claim that European modernist avant-garde theatre questioned reason (exemplified in the profound mistrust of language), focused on newness with a constant awareness of the past (whether as something to build on or reject), and placed great emphasis on socio-political context and the human as physical and thinking (or more often, non-thinking) entity.

While Beckett is often regarded as the final voice of European modernist theatre, modernist tendencies lingered (and still linger) in Harold Pinter’s comedies of menace; in Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre (which places particular emphasis on Tadeusz Kantor and Heiner Müller, amongst others); in the Happenings tradition exemplified in the European context by the work of Joseph Beuys; in the so-called ‘in-yer-face’ theatre tradition of Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane; and in the turn back to documentary theatre with plays by David Hare, Alecky Blythe and Robin Soans. All these practitioners and theorists have acknowledged a debt to the modernist innovators because, in Lehmann’s terms, ‘here the conventional dramaturgy of unity was first disrupted’ (2010: 57). These later performances retain the dual modernist concepts of antagonism and aesthetic experiment, capturing modernism’s re-evaluation of language, image and actor–audience relationship in new and exciting ways.

NOTE

1. I would, however, be careful of pronouncing them ‘expressionists’, instead subscribing to Susan Manning’s assertion that Wigman’s (and I suggest Laban’s) desire to exhibit inner feeling/emotion through outward movements meant ‘the dances bore a family resemblance to expressionism’ (2006: 5).

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

MODERNIST PAINTING IN AND AROUND PARIS

The city as site, subject, and structure,

1880–1939



Ara H. Merjian

Enraged at the exclusion of his most ambitious paintings from Paris's 1855 Exposition Universelle, Gustave Courbet erected next door to the fair his Pavilion of Realism, aimed at defying the academic establishment as brashly as the images displayed therein: ragged peasants and dusty day labourers, weighty with the thick materiality of oil paint, but liberated from the conventions of literary fantasy and quaint genre categories. As successors to Courbet's engagement with nature, a generation of painters in Paris applied his *plein air* directness to spaces of urban and suburban leisure rather than labour. Yet for all Impressionism's benign familiarity to us now, its pioneers met with an institutional hostility as vehement as that which had greeted Courbet. A decade after Courbet's Pavilion, artistic success still hinged upon admission to the annual Salon put on by the Académie de Beaux Arts. The latter's rejection of many younger artists from the 1863 exhibition – including Édouard Manet, Camille Pissarro, and James Abbott McNeill Whistler – prompted the hasty organization of a concurrent 'Salon des Refusées', which soon accrued an anti-academic cachet exceeding even Courbet's insubordinate precedent.

Paris not only formed the site of the Impressionists' affiliation, but also their most prominent subject: from Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862–63) and *Olympia* (1863), with their scandalous evocation of urban prostitution, to his protégés' paintings of boulevards, cafés, bars, train stations, dancehalls, theatres, public squares, and private balconies. As the first comprehensively modern art, Impressionism lent to the next century's avant-gardes a sustained engagement with urban existence. This essay considers how modernism undertook both to depict the spaces of modernity, and to remake them in its own image, by turns radical and reactionary. I focus on activities in and around Paris from the late nineteenth century up until the Second World War, with an emphasis on activity around the First World War. I also attempt an overview of European modernism at large, particularly as it engaged with Parisian examples, especially those bound up with the city and its visual rehearsals.

The city forms the place where ideological, social, and symbolic meanings are consecrated; it is thus also where such meanings may be revised, renegotiated, and even assailed. As the self-appointed prophets of an increasingly secular society – wherein the waning of religion left a yawning spiritual void, only intermittently filled

by the promises of positivist science – painters and poets took up the charge of renewal. Artists sought a visual mode that could adequately engage with the conditions of modern life. In the city such phenomena revealed their most salient dimensions, and artists made those dimensions into the stuff of painting, sculpture, and an ever-expanding field of aesthetic media. This is not to say that nature played no part in the modernist imagination. Indeed, as the city’s fabled ‘other’, it offered alternative spaces of dream and adventure, particularly as projected onto those lands and subjects colonized by European empire.

Whether in Henri Rousseau’s painted jungles or Picasso’s penchant for Oceanic and African masks, the ‘primitive’ formed the obverse of modernism’s sophisticated innovations: an atavistic sensibility which could breathe new life into Western representation precisely through its ‘unskilled’, primeval sincerity. Yet it was in the city that popular magazines illustrating France’s colonial jungles reached Rousseau to begin with, just as Paris’s Ethnographic Museum housed those cult sculptures and masks so vital to Picasso’s burgeoning cubist vision. It was, in short, urban circumstance – and one city in particular – that granted modernism its vital sustenance. As ‘The Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (in the words of German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin), Paris was consistently propitious to aesthetic innovation, attracting aspiring artists from around the globe.

The city also offered a concentration of contingency: passing crowds and fashions, technological and consumerist spectacles, capital circulation and its effects upon the built environment and the body alike. Charles Baudelaire’s proverbial ‘Painter of Modern Life’ took as his model that individual whom the author Edgar Allen Poe deemed ‘The Man of the Crowd’: the *flâneur*, a subject of the growing throngs of modern European and American cities, at once sharing in the spaces of mass, public conjunction, and distanced from them with the cool detachment of the observer. Though his enthusiasm for the ‘tyranny of circumstance’ galvanized many of the artists following in Manet’s footsteps, Baudelaire’s own prose and poetry turned inward for inspiration to the depths of the soul and psyche (Baudelaire 1995: 14). Paving the way for those authors and artists referred to as symbolists, Baudelaire inflected Romantic sensibilities with a hard, urban edge: a lyrical ‘forest of symbols’ (Baudelaire 1972: 457) nourished in the more anaemic soil of the modern city. Thus, while his criticism seemed to advocate for the realist fastidiousness of painters like Camille Pissarro and Mary Cassatt, Baudelaire’s symbolist theory of ‘correspondences’ also encouraged artists painting in the dissimilar vein of synthetism and mysticism, like Paul Gauguin and Maurice Denis.

While equally hostile to the dogma of Salon juries, divergent strains of modernists disagreed as to which kind of image-making might supplant the academy’s sclerotic conventions. Impressionism and its offshoots vaunted the sovereignty of the eye (‘don’t think, just paint!’) By contrast, the symbolists championed the mind’s eye: an inner vision attuned to mood, intuition, and temperament. Championing sign over likeness, symbolists as diverse as Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau, the Swiss Arnold Böcklin and Ferdinand Hodler, or the Italians Giovanni Seganti and Gaetano Previati, defied naturalism’s logic in favour of arcane sources and effects. A few notable artists – Vincent Van Gogh chief among them – combined elements of Impressionist immediacy and late Romantic emotiveness. Anticipating expressionism (in light of a very different relationship to the eye and the psyche), Van Gogh’s

contorted cypress trees and churning skies derive from nature, but are filtered through the artist's restive interiority. Marrying spontaneous brushwork with the stylized, decorative planes of his colleague Gauguin, Van Gogh's images divert attention from their pictorial illusions to paint's basic materiality.

Paul Cézanne broke even further with aesthetic schemas. His mature still lifes and landscapes marry fastidious observation of nature with increasingly idiosyncratic rendering of space. Following decades of early work shot through with late-Romantic brooding, and having participated in the Third Impressionist Exhibition of 1877, Cézanne went on to develop a style that, like the artist himself, endured well into the Belle Epoque. While most of his work remained anchored in his native Provence, his influences echoed most consequentially in Paris. As of the 1880s, Cézanne loosened his brushwork, retreating from narrative scenes and renouncing traditional perspective for the immediacy of plastic sensation, laid down without regard for spatial hierarchy. In the landscapes of the 1880s and 1890s, positive and negative space, foreground and recession, proximity and distance, appear increasingly interchangeable. Objects (leaves, trees, rocks) become indistinguishable from the surrounding air; space assumes as much importance as things. The seemingly unfinished nature of Cézanne's fragmented geometries compels attention to their formal qualities. This encouraged an entire generation of painters to divorce the handling of paint from the duties of illusionism. Originally denounced by the majority of critics, Cézanne's coarse brushwork and inexplicably flattened planes became a badge of pride for a range of artists, as did his sacrifice of linear clarity for brute sensation (Fraschina and Harrison 1982: 205). The artist's death in 1906 occasioned a retrospective of his work at the 1907 Salon d'Automne in Paris, where his influences were felt almost immediately. Fauvist painters such as Henri Matisse and Georges Braque had already begun combining Cézanne's raw, post-Impressionist brushwork with improbable, saturated colours; exhibited at the same Salon, Matisse's *The Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* (1907) announced an unprecedented flatness, mixed with an exoticism that took Cézanne's 'primitivism' to new extremes.

Braque's sustained collaboration with Picasso – a venture equally steeped in wilfully primitivizing tendencies – proved even more vital to twentieth-century aesthetics. The pair's experiments over 1908–9 soon converged in a shared vocabulary of forms, already visible in Braque's *Houses at L'Estaque* (1908) and Picasso's *Reservoir at Horta de Ebro* (summer 1909). Both apply Cézanne's lessons to blocky, architectural masses, inviting the cubist epithet by which their imagery would be denounced and celebrated in equal measure. Picasso's residence among bohemian and anarchist circles in Barcelona informed his early efforts in Paris, featuring shabby garrets, absinthe drinkers, and the Montmartre demi-monde. Though not exhibited until several years later, his *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) combined a consummately urban theme (the modern brothel) with a revolutionary depiction of bodies in relation to their environment. Braque later called their shared effort 'a research into space' (Kern 2003: 161) – one that in Picasso's *Landscape with Posters* (summer 1912) includes both the city's structures and urban advertisements. Such a use of decidedly lowbrow subject matter reflected a widespread undermining of aesthetic hierarchies. Nonetheless, Picasso and Braque's early cubism homes in most frequently on domestic still lifes and cloistered individuals. The images they influenced, however, opened the cubist aesthetic out onto the public spaces of the city, finding in these geometries the

perfect vehicle for an evolving pictorial idiom. Beginning with Raymond Duchamp-Villon's 1912 maquette for the *Maison Cubiste*, up through International Style architecture between the World Wars, cubism duly influenced the built environment. Yet it was upon representations of the city that it proved more immediately consequential.

Robert Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower* paintings (1910–11) reveal the beacon of Parisian modernity as buckling and splintering, reduced to shards laid plumb against congealed swatches of air, cloud, and light. His *Windows* series (1910–12) further schematizes the tower into a tight grid which barely clings to figuration, announcing cubism's unparalleled influence upon twentieth-century abstraction. Fernand Léger likewise took Paris as his subject, distilling rooftops to intersecting planes and reducing bourgeois couples leaving the theatre to tubes and cylinders. The fragmentation and simultaneity of much cubist imagery – with successive moments laid in the same pictorial plane – heralded a new expressive dimension for painting. Marcel Duchamp produced some of the most original interpretations of those temporal qualities in *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911), *Sad Young Man on a Train* (1911), and the infamous *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), which draws upon Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic motion studies but eschews scientific precision for a flightier 'fourth dimension'. As theorized by various proponents, cubism's 'free, mobile perspective' drew even more intensely upon Henri Bergson, whose writings on duration and flux helped justify cubism's intersecting planes and overlapping edges (Antliff and Leighton 2001: 77). Renouncing the rigid integers of mechanical time in favour of rippling, interpenetrating rhythms, Bergson's philosophy granted artists a privileged 'intuition' (2001: 71, 85).

The avant-garde proved ambivalent toward the urban masses: now prizing them as a source of anti-bourgeois disdain, now reviling them for their vulgar indifference to cultural subtleties. While many sympathized with the collectivist imperatives of Jules Romains' Unanimism, others chose the solitary path of Friedrich Nietzsche's will to power. Concerned with the sovereignty of poetry over prose, of individual consciousness over the 'herd', Nietzsche's philosophy imagined a world wrought from new myths, with artists as their self-styled officiants. As one such 'seer', the Greek-born Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico applied Nietzsche's philosophy to his metaphysical images in Paris before the First World War: sunlit cityscapes staging an incongruous mix of Greco-Roman antiquity and modern objects, fruits of revelations as illogical as they are figuratively realistic. Picasso's remark to Ramón Gomez de la Serna – 'I paint things as I think them, not as I see them' – captures a similarly oracular agency, played out in pictorial forms grounded in the physical world, but beholden to the vagaries of will and subjectivity (qtd. in Golding 1988: 51). Cubist experimentation with new materials raised the stakes of that paradox; as it drew 'real' objects into the orbit of painted representation, it laid bare the artificiality of illusionism itself. Inspired by the accoutrements of café life – glasses, newspapers, tabletops, musical instruments – Picasso and Braque's collages and *papiers collés* mixed an unprecedented range of media: cardboard, tin, imitation wood grains, tissue paper, even whole objects now invaded the hallowed domain of the frame.

Such impertinence offended many. In cubism, however, countless artists and critics found a pictorial language in sync with modern (especially urban) life's dissonances and harmonies, its unprecedented freedoms, and the frequent anguish these generated.

The German expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner incorporated cubist brushwork to heighten his images' sense of urban alienation, while Franz Marc applied the same angularity to his rhythmic elegies to animal life. Cubism quickly influenced cinema (Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924); music (Igor Stravinsky's concertos); and literature (Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, 1914, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, 1922), as well as new artistic tendencies, whether rayonism and suprematism in Russia, vorticism in England, or synchromism and orphism closer to home. It lay to futurism, however, to synthesize wide-ranging experiments into a comprehensive avant-garde programme.

The Francophone poet, publisher, and impresario F.T. Marinetti launched Italian futurism in 1909 from Milan, the sole industrial metropolis in a largely agrarian nation. Inducted belatedly into twentieth-century modernity, Italy remained indentured to past glories – the revered artworks and academies that Marinetti vowed to demolish. He exalted instead speed, youth, and the machine, rallying to his side a host of artists and authors, who drafted manifestos on everything from 'The Painting of Sounds, Noises and Smells' to 'The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe' (Rainey *et al.* 2009: 155–8).

As this last title suggests, the movement's ambitions encompassed life at large, beginning and ending with the city:

We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervour of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke.

(Rainey *et al.* 2009: 51)

The Impressionists had first made urban life into a worthy subject of representation. Even as Marinetti declared futurism's Italianness, his artists took many of their esthetic cues from Paris. Before their February 1912 exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim Jeune, the futurists hastily toured Parisian studios, updating their style with strategies that had revolutionized modernism over the past few years. The divisionist swirls of Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* (1911) gave way later that year to an angular cubist faceting plainly derived from the Parisian visit. Characteristically set in an urban milieu, Gino Severini's *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin* (1912) mixes cubist facility with a heightened attention to movement, duration, and simultaneity: the bodies of its two central dancers ripple outward to merge with the surrounding *café chantant*, while geometric swatches recede and congeal, fragment and overlap, evoking sound, sight, and sensory bustle.

Concerned with expressing dynamism – the shibboleth of futurist creed – a few artists revised cubist precedent with more aggressive dissections of form, whether Boccioni's extraordinary sculptural experiments of 1912–14, or Giacomo Balla's studies of speeding vehicles. Yet futurism was more an ideological than a *formal* revolution. Thanks to Marinetti's flair (and funds) for self-promotion, the group's manifestos circulated in London and Moscow as easily as Milan or Rome, making futurism the first truly international avant-garde, in spite of its nationalist tenor. Salon cubism had instigated its own share of cultural politics, with artists and critics

falling out as to its ‘Gothic’, ‘Celtic’, or ‘Latin’ essence (while still others denounced it as a German importation, spelling it ‘kubism’ for good measure). But futurism aimed explicitly to transform Italian society, and to up-end parliamentary politics, using every means of expression available. ‘We desperately want to re-enter into life’, declared the artists’ 1910 ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting’, a desire reflected in experiments with photography and clothing, architecture and theatre (Rainey *et al.* 2009: 64–6). More than any specific medium, the futurists aimed to overhaul culture at large, assailing the boundaries between art and daily existence, intellect and action. That assault extended to war itself, which Marinetti deemed ‘the world’s only hygiene’ and ‘the most beautiful poem’ (2009: 84). The group formed an avant-garde in the most literal, military sense, agitating for intervention in the First World War, and forming their own battalion along the northern front. Futurism’s bellicose virility also lent significant momentum to the dawning Fascist revolution by 1919, when Marinetti stood for elections alongside Benito Mussolini – a rapport that, while often strained, underscored both fascism’s radical origins and futurism’s nationalist toxicity. Modernism is most often associated with left-leaning politics; futurism’s stands as an unsettling corrective to that reciprocity, and reveals modernism’s frequently paradoxical ideologies and intentions.

Ironically enough, dada’s anti-war stirrings bore out futurism’s most immediate influence, first in neutral Switzerland during the First World War, and then in post-war Berlin, Cologne, and Paris. Dada borrowed futurism’s strategies of shock and illogic, assaulting received truths and middle-class morality alike. To these, however, the dadaists married a resolute anti-nationalism, rejecting the war and its institutional agents. In protest at technology’s mounting use in destruction and colonialism, dada embraced irrationalism and indeterminacy; the term ‘dada’ itself signifies multiple meanings in different languages, but also forms a mere nonsense word. In its Berlin phase, dada assumed an aggressively political edge, in tandem with Germany’s tense revolutionary post-war atmosphere. Dada’s demolition of language fused with the splintering of centuries-old empires and monarchies, adopting aspects of surprise, displacement, and disruption to anti-aesthetic ends. Dada aimed to unsettle, knocking the institution of art from its millennial pedestal. With nails tacked to the front of an iron, Man Ray’s *Gift* (1921) proves equally playful and antagonistic, especially in the disjunction between its title and its appearance. Such interventions sought to throw the viewer off guard, to short-circuit encrusted habits and expectations.

The use of everyday objects in – or *as* – art reached a fever pitch by 1914, finding in Marcel Duchamp its most important practitioner. The readymade object formed a natural extension of collage, with its incorporation of real materials. Severini’s *Dynamic Hieroglyph* reveals real sequins pasted onto its dancers’ dresses, while Picasso’s 1914 *Glass of Absinthe* inserts a real spoon into its stylized bronze glass. Duchamp’s *Bottlerack* up-ended the notion of sculpture more definitively, conflating a utilitarian object with a work of art. Untouched by the artist’s hand, this kitchen tool became an aesthetic object solely by dint of Duchamp’s re-presentation of it as such. Like the work of Francis Picabia, Duchamp’s contributions to Paris dada were mischievous, but also hinged upon an attraction to the anonymity of machines, for their indifference to questions of ‘craft’, authorship, or genius. Upon visiting a show of aeronautical design in 1912, Duchamp famously announced to his peers that painting was ‘finished’ (Hulten 1993: n.p.; 16–17 March). He deemed a new

airplane propeller ‘the future of sculpture’, and later cheekily described America’s sole contribution to modern art as ‘her plumbing and her bridges’ (qtd. in Masheck 2002: xxi).

Alongside Duchamp, Picabia, and Tristan Tzara’s mischievous activities in post-war Paris, a very different trend emerged, equally concerned with modern machines but to decidedly different ends. The purist paintings of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (the architect Le Corbusier) and Amédée Ozenfant embraced mechanization as a source of streamlined function and classical order. Purist still lifes of mass-produced objects bespeak a domestic realm in thrall to modern industry’s crisp, finished products (rather than the labour that produces them). Part of a wider European ‘return to order’, purism’s limpid lines react against the chaos of the war, and the cubist imagery, which seemed both its symptom and instigator. Even as it advocated for a ‘New Spirit’ in tune with urban modernity, purism appealed to aspects of Mediterranean antiquity to guide the way, finding its latter-day manifestation in a cubism cleansed of formal disorder. As the most influential of twentieth-century architects, Le Corbusier reconciled an idealized geometry to a rationalist tectonics, where object and environment seem effortlessly integrated.

Over and against rationalism, and all the social and sexual vitality that it repressed, the surrealist movement emerged in Paris in 1924. Inspired by de Chirico’s cityscapes and dadaist antics, the circle around André Breton claimed the unconscious as its aesthetic touchstone, a world of dreams which might – by liberating irrational desires – complete the revolution left unfinished by Marxist pragmatism. ‘No face is surrealist in the same degree as the true face of a city’, Walter Benjamin declared of the movement (1986: 182), which indeed took Paris as an open theatre of surprise encounter and ‘objective chance’. The city’s institutional distinction – in determining national identity, social contract, and architectural order – made it an object of surrealist subversion. Borrowing from the Comte de Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror*, surrealism sought combinations ‘as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table’ (Gale 1997: 221). The city was a site of fortuitous accident and absurd conjunction, a kind of collage at large. In Breton’s novels *Nadja* (1928) and *L’amour Fou* (1937), any sense of plot is superseded by the city’s charisma, which rivals even the presence of the women who provided surrealism with tropes of primitive ‘marvel’ (most often at the expense of female subjectivity itself). Numerous women contributed to the movement, including Jacqueline Lambda, Leonora Carrington, and Merit Oppenheim, but others were relegated to the role of muse to prominent male surrealists like Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Joan Miró, and Alberto Giacometti, who organized dadaist dissent into a programmatic movement. They wrote questionnaires, held seminars, and undertook collaborative experiments in the service of revolution. At the same time, they bridled against the application of psychoanalysis as a science, preferring instead to preserve the unconscious’ potential for sabotaging bourgeois propriety.

Surrealism found a more urgent enemy in fascism. Between Mussolini’s seizure of power in 1922, and the victory of the Nazi party in 1933, the avant-garde’s proposed utopias came under increasing threat. As their activities diversified, the core surrealist group also transformed; Louis Aragon left for a closer alliance to the Soviet Communist party, while others either were expelled by Breton or defected to other projects. Though easel painting endured as a vehicle of private reverie (and nightmare),

the 1930s witnessed the rise of the mural and of monumental sculpture as more fitting means for mass politics. The French Popular Front tried out these forms as well; murals by Fernand Léger and Charlotte Perriand ventured a populist imagery that still hoped to win the battle for culture. But the Republic was not immune to fascism, as an embattled Socialist government held off a homegrown nationalist movement, and Paris hosted a dramatic confrontation of totalitarian cultures at the 1937 Exposition des Arts et Techniques. Erected on either side of the Trocadéro, the towering Nazi and Soviet pavilions announced a brave new world of inimical social experiments, already clashing south of the Alps.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936–9 formed a dress rehearsal for the coming confrontation between fascism and its rivals. Sparked by General Francisco Franco's coup against the democratically elected Spanish Republic, the war echoed across Europe, including Paris's fairground galleries. Picasso's sprawling *Guernica* (1937) resurrected the legacies of his own cubism to denounce the German-led strafing of a Basque village, and the larger civilization for which it stood. At once activist and allegorical, the black, white, and gray composition fractures bodies and space, yet bears the monumental dignity of a classical pediment. Even in its evocation of an archetypal, millennial pathos, *Guernica* presents a distinctly twentieth-century anguish, its forms at once inextricable from modernity (and its technological horrors), and an aesthetic and emotional palliative to those afflictions. Upon the fair's closing, the canvas went on a tour to raise funds for the Republican cause, travelling first to Scandinavia, then England, and on to New York, where numerous European artists themselves took refuge from the Nazis. As the German occupation and its Vichy accomplices snuffed out the last embers of Paris' legendary 'Années Folles', in a city now riven by occupation and resistance, collaboration and retribution, Paris gradually ceded its cultural preeminence, while New York – galvanized with fresh international energy and a generation of exiles – emerged to take its place.

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PART VI

LATIN AMERICA



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CHAPTER FORTY

MODERNIST INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS IN LATIN AMERICA



Amy A. Oliver

In Latin American intellectual history, modernism is a term that can be usefully and accurately applied to at least two distinct intellectual movements: a clearly definable modernist movement in Spanish-speaking Latin America (1880–1920) and another in Brazil (1922–45). Both modernist movements exploded on their respective scenes and represented cultural ruptures. Understandably, these two movements have somewhat different origins, contexts, consequences, trajectories, and groupings of thinkers as well as different legacies of influence and community. In most of those senses, therefore, they are largely unrelated, yet both have left enduring cultural legacies in their respective regions. Literature, thought, art, architecture, photography, and music are principal areas in which modernism has made its mark.

MODERNISM IN SPANISH AMERICA

There is a critical tradition associated with Rubén Darío, the leading modernist figure, who effectively inaugurated the movement with his collection of poems and stories, *Azul* (1888), a radical departure from previous traditions. His mature work, *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905), incorporates his heightened awareness of world events. With the collapse of the Spanish empire in 1898, Darío traveled to Europe as a correspondent for *La Nación*, a Buenos Aires newspaper, and was exposed to continental perspectives on political developments. Both Spaniards and Latin Americans became acutely concerned about the spectre of American imperialism after the defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American War. Latin Americans were essentially confronted with the notion that they would have to take a stance toward the United States, and it became clear that they would not sympathize with a country that would become infamous for dollar diplomacy, big stick diplomacy, and its ‘good neighbour’ policy. Instead, Spanish Americans elected to reaffirm their Hispanic and Latin heritage by relying on Greek and Roman classics and Spanish baroque poets such as Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo.

In his poem ‘Ode to Roosevelt’, Darío embraces pan-Hispanism as he disdains US imperialism and Protestantism. Theodore Roosevelt represented US invasions of Latin America and, as president, supported a revolution in Panama in 1903 that

resulted in the annexation by the United States of territory for the Panama Canal. In 1904, he announced a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine that justified the use of the US military to police Latin America. Thus, modernism initially contrasted the Latin American with the American, but quickly came to oppose the north within the hemisphere.

Rubén Darío self-consciously disseminated the modernist movement widely during stays in Spain, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba. Modernism in this Hispanic context was trans-Atlantic in scope because it included peninsular Spanish poets and writers, especially the members of Spain's Generation of '98, who also grappled with what its definitive departure from the New World might mean. Some leading Spanish modernists were Rosalía de Castro, Ramón del Valle Inclán, Antonio Machado, and Juan Ramón Jiménez.

There is some consensus that literature is the medium most associated with modernism in Spanish America, a multi-national but self-aware movement that began to be taken somewhat seriously coincident to other developments that have come to be called naturalism and realism. Modernism was the first literary movement to focus deliberately and self-consciously on the New World. From its beginnings, it was usually anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist, and announced itself through significant ruptures with conventional forms. While modernism received influences from Parnassianism and symbolism, and often consciously rejected the naturalism of Émile Zola, its Spanish American practitioners often sought to create a distinct literary style that showcased Latin American realities.

To provide a general background, Théophile Gautier was a key Parnassian influence who promoted the idea of 'art for art's sake', the exaltation of form and style over content, and a taste for Asian decorative arts and exotic landscapes. French symbolists who influenced Spanish American writers include Stéphane Mallarmé for his use of metaphor; Paul Verlaine for his sense of rhythm in metre; and Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud for their use of synaesthesia, a phenomenon in which one kind of sensation produces a secondary subjective sensation (e.g. when one hears certain music, one thinks of a certain colour).

In addition to Rubén Darío, some principal early literary modernists in Spanish America were the Cubans José Martí and Julián del Casal and the Mexican Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. Among second-wave modernists were the Bolivian Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, the Mexican Amado Nervo, the Argentine Leopoldo Lugones, and the Uruguayan Julio Herrera y Reissig. Although poetry and the short story were their predominant genres, the Latin American novel, especially the regionalist novel, later manifested modernist characteristics as well. One of Martí's books, *Versos Sencillos*, is set to music in the popular Cuban song 'Guantanamera', which begins:

A sincere man am I
From the land where palm trees grow,
And I want before I die
My soul's verses to bestow.

Spanish American modernists adopted Parnassian tendencies toward a cult of beauty, a preoccupation with historical themes, and a focus on earlier periods in history. Modernist work was often imbued with a liberal presence of colours (especially jewel

tones), exotic animals, an obsession with form, anti-clerical sentiments, and liberal use of relatively obscure vocabulary. Graceful swans, the colours blue and white, and cool marble are images that appeared often in Spanish American modernist poetry and short stories. Included in Darío's *Azul* is 'The Death of the Empress of China', a prime example of a modernist short story. As an associated dimension, an influential pair of modernist journals began to be published in Mexico, *La Revista Azul* (1894–6) and *La Revista Moderna* (1898–1911).

In philosophy, modernism reacted against positivism, preferring instead the new philosophy of life as put forth by figures such as Henri Bergson. The Uruguayan thinker and essayist José Enrique Rodó authored a seminal modernist piece entitled *Ariel* (1900), subsequently published in various languages in over 60 editions. On the one hand, *Ariel* had a political, consciousness-raising mission on several levels. It was published just two years after the Spanish-American War when memories lingered of earlier imperialist episodes, such as the Mexican-American War and the annexation of Texas. There was considerable, deep worry in Latin America about the ambitions of the Colossus of the North; and yet there was no small amount of fascination with the United States. Rodó was aware that, with the close of the nineteenth century, Latin Americans needed to think carefully about their future. After 1900, Latin American nations became involved in rebuilding their continent, which had lost its way under the influence of economic and political policies that threatened their sovereignty.

On the other hand, Rodó's essay was noteworthy for its elegant style, artistic prose, and cosmopolitan references and allusions. *Ariel* contained an argument supporting an innate Latin American aesthetic sensibility linked to high moral development along with the hope that Latin America's youth would use their aesthetic and moral gifts to advance Latin America's rightful place in the centre of twentieth century culture. Many still timely themes in Rodó's *Ariel* emerge partly from the historical context of its publication.

At the same time, *Ariel* is a kind of anti-positivist manifesto. Like many intellectuals of his generation, Rodó had been steeped in the Spencerian positivism that pervaded Latin American universities in the 1890s, including the University of Montevideo, where Rodó taught. However, by the turn of the century, he was primed to think in new ways that would demonstrate positivism's shortcomings and the damage it could do to societies. The sense of the aesthetic in Rodó runs counter to the spirit of positivism, which holds that the real is the measurable, and thus does not allow for the complexity, depth, breadth, flexibility, nuance, and broad associations of aesthetic phenomena. Rodó encouraged Latin Americans to regularly explore these latter dimensions of aesthetics. He was well read in Greek classics and European (especially French) thought, though his philosophical preoccupations were concerned with Latin America rather than Europe or Greece.

In photography, Manuel Álvarez Bravo of Mexico was another exemplar of modernism. After exploring cubism and all the possibilities offered by abstraction, he began to explore modern aesthetics. His arresting photographs generally involved inhabited space, even if obvious inhabitants were not always present. His aesthetic sense joined the documentary and the poetic, moving toward an insistence on an ethical dimension in photography. His work inspired generations of excellent photographers in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

Highly visible Mexican modernist architecture is found in the buildings and grounds of the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, designed by Carlos Lazo, Enrique Del Moral, and Mario Pani, and built beginning in 1950. This architecture is noteworthy for its inclusion of the art of the well-known Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Architect Juan O’Gorman’s enormous, natural-stone mosaic mural, which depicts the history of Mexican culture, adorns the exterior of the university library and serves as a familiar landmark in Mexico City.

Luis Barragán, born in Guadalajara, was one of the most creative modernist architects in Mexico. Light, water, primary geometric forms, and vivid colours were his favorite components. Although Barragán was exposed to the work of Le Corbusier and the landscape architecture of Ferdinand Bac during a trip to the Exposition des Arts-Décoratifs in Paris in 1925, he did not develop his modernist style until the 1930s after having met and befriended the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco on a trip to New York, where the latter was living in exile. Barragán moved to Mexico City where most of his modernist designs were erected. His work did not receive much international attention until late in his career when the Museum of Modern Art in New York organized an exhibition of it in 1977. Luis Barragán won the Pritzker Prize in 1980.

Although modernism as a self-consciously formal movement has been viewed as ending around 1920 in Spanish America as the result of the early deaths of several of its practitioners, many vestiges of it remain. Beyond the regionalist novel, many authors of prose fiction of the ‘boom’ of the 1960s and 1970s (famously, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez) utilized chromatic imagery, imagery of exotic animals, elaborate story developments, and unorthodox forms. While there is some debate about whether the writers of the ‘boom’ were modernists or whether they should be classified in some other way, a spirit of modernism encouraged the embrace of the autochthonous, the self-confident valorization of Latin American culture, and the opening of new avenues for artistic expression.

BRAZILIAN MODERNISM

Modernism in Brazil was a rupture that challenged what Brazilians were thinking upon the outbreak of the First World War. Brazilian modernists revolted against European influences that had dominated the arts in Brazil. Mário de Andrade, the ‘pope’ of modernism, viewed the movement as a rebellious and revolutionary state of mind. If Spanish-American modernism primarily encompassed poetic and literary innovation in form and Latin American tradition, modernism in Portuguese-speaking Latin America was a substantially different kind of movement. It added new traditions to old, creatively blended local and international cultures, and joined popular culture with high cultures. Modernism in Brazil appeared much later than it did in Spanish-speaking Latin America. Arguably, the first modernist phase in Brazil spans 1922 to 1930. Brazil won political independence in 1822, and modernism came on the scene a century later in a concentrated burst when avant-garde intellectuals and artists celebrated the Week of Modern Art in February of 1922 at the Municipal Theatre in São Paulo. This crucial week was organized into three festivals: painting and sculpture, literature and poetry, and music. Many of the Brazilian modernists adapted

ideas and language they experienced in Paris in the 1920s by applying European avant-garde themes to their own nativist art. The Week of Modern Art featured paintings by Anita Malfatti and Tarsila do Amaral, poetry readings that included deliberately experimental, intentionally ungrammatical use of the Portuguese language, manifesto readings, and concerts. The classical composer Heitor Villa-Lobos added percussion and folk music to traditional works. One seeming result of the festival was to take art out of the academy and associated privileged institutions and bring it closer to more social groups, all in more popular and accessible ways.

The Modernist Group of Five consisted of key figures associated with the festival and with endeavouring to bridge a perceived gap between the metropolis and the backwater: Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, Menotti del Picchia, Mário de Andrade, and Oswald de Andrade. Other influential Brazilian modernists include the poets Manuel Bandeira and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, the painters Emiliano di Cavalcanti and Lasar Segall, and the essayist Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, who was the author of key studies of Brazilian cultural history such as *Raízes do Brasil* (1936) and *Caminhos e Fronteiras* (1957).

Tarsila do Amaral represented the nativist movement called Pau-Brasil (a native Brazilian tree with reddish wood). The subjects of her paintings, such as *EFCB* and *Morro da Favela* from 1924, combine the industrialized modernity of São Paulo (a city of little green space) with the picturesque, lush, tropical environment of suburban and rural Brazil. Emiliano di Cavalcanti evolved from an art nouveau style to a cubist style, as seen in his *Samba* (1925) and *Cinco Moças de Guaratinguetá* (1930). Lasar Segall moved from German expressionism to a cubist style, as seen in *Banana Plantation* (1927). During the 1920s, nationalism expanded in Brazilian art and Tarsila do Amaral's Pau-Brasil style grew into the Antropofagia movement, in which artists assimilated foreign influences while fiercely maintaining an independent, Brazilian stance. Paintings had less to do with the everydayness of Pau-Brasil and became more oneiric and mythic. In 1930, the Depression devastated Brazil's coffee industry, and the political revolution of Getúlio Vargas altered its political climate. Such events affected the arts world and combined to bring the first phase of modernism to a close.

The second phase of modernism in Brazil, from 1931 to 1945, featured greater interest in social art while maintaining modernist stylistic techniques. Two primary groups of painters during this period were the Grupo Santa Helena and the Família Artística Paulista. Both groups emphasized the perfection of technique. Cândido Portinari was the best-known painter of this period. His modernism was influenced by Mexican muralism and cubism. His paintings of labourers incorporated many of Brazil's natural resources such as coffee, minerals, and cotton. The Brazilian government commissioned his murals in public and government buildings. Portinari also painted murals in the Hispanic Reading Room of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and in the United Nations building in New York. In June of 1931, a group of artists who were students at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro formed the Núcleo Bernadelli to nurture free artistic expression and to move away from the academic tradition. These artists included Bruno Lechowski, Manoel Santiago, José Pancetti, Quirino Campofiorito, Bustamante Sá, João José Rescala, and Milton Dacosta. Although production of predominantly modernist painting declined around 1945, access to an overview of the movement was just becoming

possible around this time. Museums of modern art opened to the general public after 1945, such as the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, São Paulo's Museu de Arte Moderna, and the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. These brought together many paintings that had been in private collections and made them accessible to the general population. In the 1950s, modernism spread throughout Brazil as exhibitions were held in other cities such as Ceará, Salvador, and Recife. In turn, more modern art centres were established.

In the Brazilian context, modernism represented a rupture from stances looking primarily to France and occasionally to Portugal for cultural aesthetics and instead often involved self-conscious decisions to 'cannibalize' those elements of European aesthetics that could desirably be adapted to the Brazilian context (e.g. French cubism and Italian futurism), while then adding some native components (e.g. the African, indigenous, and rural elements of the country), all to create something new and authentic to Brazil. The poet Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* (Cannibal Manifesto, 1928) developed this concept of cultural cannibalism.

Within this new direction, some salient characteristics of Brazilian modernism are captured within an appreciation of Indigenous and Black elements. While racism was pervasive in Brazilian society, there existed simultaneously a new insistence on openness to the more 'exotic' parts of the population and recognition that they represented a source of potential enrichment. In an apparent contradiction, together with the appreciation of Indian and Black elements, this Brazilian modernism retained aristocratic components in which there were careful and self-aware moves by the white elite to appropriate and nationalize modernism, so as to continue to control the course of cultural developments.

Hybridity, or blurring the distinction between tradition and modernism, and between the national and the cosmopolitan, was another modernist characteristic. Brazilian modernists sought to retain certain elements of the country's colonial legacy as well as to adapt some European doctrines without being dominated by them, and to celebrate native, tropical, post-colonial innovations without falling into nationalism. In literature, the first phase of modernism saw competing artistic and political ideologies. Oswald de Andrade represented the left. Brazilians surpassed some limiting nationalist trends such as *verdamarelismo* (green-and-yellowism, the national colours), practiced by the novelist and fascist leader Plínio Salgado and by the poet-historian Cassiano Ricardo. The latter's visual poetry was part of concrete poetry, a genre in which the typographical arrangement of words into shapes conveys meaning as much as traditional poetic components such as words, rhythm, and rhyme. How best to represent the uniqueness of Brazilian character was the focus of national debate.

While many of the early Brazilian modernists excelled in poetry and painting, more of the second-wave modernists were novelists and architects. Regional novelists showcased Brazilian features such as cane fields, the jungle, the *sertão*, cacao plantations, and *gauchos* in the south. José Lins de Rego, Raquel de Queiroz, and José Américo de Almeida wrote novels that portrayed northeastern Brazil in decline from drought, banditry, electoral fraud, and other social problems. Among the novelists whose works are available in translation are Graciliano Ramos, Erico Veríssimo, and Jorge Amado. Amado portrayed the underclasses of Bahia in more than 20 novels such as *Jubiabá* (1935), *The Violent Land* (1943), *Gabriela, Clove*,

and *Cinnamon* (1958), *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1966), and *Tent of Miracles* (1969). Perhaps the most highly regarded novelist of the period, however, is Graciliano Ramos, who was less a regionalist writer than a psychological realist and stylistic innovator whose novels happen to be set in the arid northeast. Many of his best novels are available in English translation, such as *São Bernardo* (1934), *Anguish* (1936), and *Barren Lives* (1938). Some outstanding urban novelists include Dionélio Machado, Lúcio Cardoso, and Erico Veríssimo. Machado was a psychiatrist who wrote 11 novels, among them *Os Ratos* (1935), which covers a day in the life of a lower middle-class protagonist. Cardoso's *Crônica da Casa Assassinated* (1959) is a psychological portrayal of decadence in a powerful, wealthy family. Veríssimo wrote 16 novels about lower middle-class *gauchos* in Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil, such as the four-volume *The Time and the Wind* (1949–61).

Of the many modernist figures in Brazil, historian Richard M. Morse determined, 'Mário de Andrade was perhaps not *the* leader of modernism. But more nearly than anyone else he *was* modernism, with his iconoclasm and concealed nostalgia, his lyricism and social consciousness' (Morse 1950: 449). Mário de Andrade embodied the movement so well because he practiced in so many of the disciplines associated with São Paulo modernism: he was a poet, novelist, musicologist, art historian, and photographer. His informative essay, 'The modernist movement' (de Andrade 2008 [1942]), was a reminiscence and analysis of the Week of Modernist Art 20 years after the event, noteworthy for its valorization of Brazil's cultural and racial diversity (rural, African, and Indian contributions).

While the Week of Modernist Art in 1922 was crucial to the modernist explosion in literature, music, and painting, it had little effect on architecture, which came to modernism more than a decade later and was encouraged by President Getúlio Vargas who promoted a 'new state'. In 1935, Lúcio Costa accepted a commission to design the Ministry of Education and Health building in Rio de Janeiro. Costa added to his team Oscar Niemeyer and Affonso Eduardo Reidy and later Le Corbusier, who had lectured in Rio in 1929 to great acclaim. Reinforced concrete became a signature material of curvaceous Brazilian modernist architecture, partly for its aesthetic value in sculptural plasticity, low cost, and adaptability to tropical environs, but also because structural steel became scarce during the Second World War.

Costa seized on a rare and unique opportunity for architects when he won the competition for the design of a new capital of Brazil to be constructed in Goiás in the interior. President Juscelino Kubitschek announced the competition in 1955 and unconditionally supported Costa's project with unlimited funds and a broad freedom of design. Niemeyer, who did not like the right angles and straight lines of traditional architecture, designed many of the public and government buildings, full of folded concrete curves, for the capital. Together, Costa and Niemeyer created Brasília in the form of a cross (like an 'x' marking a spot on a map), which was thought to look like an airplane, laying out two broad, perpendicular avenues that define the city, which were then sprinkled with modernist structures, some more distinctive than others. Perhaps the most stunning is the Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lady of Aparecida, which consists of 18 boomerang-shaped concrete columns with stained glass between them and looks like a sheaf of wheat gathered together. Visitors descend below ground to enter the cathedral and then ascend to the sanctuary, which heightens the effect of the light coming through the stained glass and attracts the gaze upward to

dramatic effect. Modernist architecture was made uniquely Brazilian by combining it with tropicality. Signature features were such functionalist components as the brise-soleil and all-glass walls. The futuristic city received international attention and became Brazil's most famous architectural achievement. Niemeyer's influence on subsequent generations of architects continued unabated throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.

The modernist movement contributed to a famous, common sentiment that Brazil is the land where tomorrow never comes, a nation where all is yet to be done. Modern Brazil set out to build its civilization with the building blocks it determined to be appropriate and possible for its context while also conserving desired elements of its colonial past. In Spanish America, modernists advocated for a kind of pan-Hispanism that paved the way for Latin Americans to be Latin American in their own way and on their own terms. Initially, the Spanish-American modernists turned away from a conscious emphasis on a Latin American identity and looked inward to the imagination and creativity of the artists.

Both the Brazilian and the Spanish-American modernists sought to conserve valued elements of heritage and tradition while at the same time forging a unique style that took into account autochthonous foundations and defined an aesthetic path toward the future.

Borrowing from the French Parnassians and symbolists in Spanish America and, in the Brazilian case, 'cannibalizing' European artistic contributions, both Spanish-American and Brazilian modernists adapted these international influences in ways that became distinctly Latin American.

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

ARCHITECTURAL LATIN AMERICAN MODERNISM

Twentieth-century politics, historiography and the academic debate



Felipe Hernández

The concept of Latin American architectural modernism generates contradictory reactions. While architects like Oscar Niemeyer and Luis Barragán are internationally recognized figures, many architects and theorists in the continent have raised important questions about modernism's socio-cultural implications. It is true that architects such as Lucio Costa, Christian De Groote, Eladio Dieste, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Rogelio Salmona, Clorindo Testa, and Carlos Raul Villanueva have (and continue to) influenced architecture since the mid twentieth century, but their work remains in relative obscurity for most people; it is known to architects, the educated socio-economic elites, and those working in arts and design. The totality of their work represents an insignificant fraction of all construction in Latin America, and their buildings represent a small portion of the population. As with modernist architects elsewhere, these figures' buildings do not represent the majority; they become representative through a discourse that has made them valuable as part of a tradition.¹ Another reason for the growing discomfort with the notion of modernism amongst Latin American architects is the close linkage to North American cultural institutions, and to the US government, especially in the mid twentieth century. Many architectural scholars and practitioners today feel that modern architectural identities in Latin America were created by North American institutions with an interest in disseminating modernism – and their interest was political and economic, rather than architectural, social, philanthropic, or even idealistic. As such, exploring architectural modernism in Latin America is complicated and politicized.

Since the 1940s, when the work commonly taken to represent architectural Latin American modernism was identified, architects and historians have produced different interpretations depending on the scholars' regions. European, North American scholars tend to anchor modernism in the period between 1930–60,² while Latin American scholars focus on the century's last three decades, precisely to exceed the limitations imposed by Euro-American curation. Both groups, however, seek elements that articulate a discourse of continental cohesion, uniting architects and their buildings across the region. Euro-American scholars have gone so far as to claim that 'the modern movement in architecture was the intellectual property of certain countries in Western Europe, of the United States and of some parts of the Soviet

Union' (Curtis 2009 [1982]: 491). Curtis continues, 'By the end of the 1950s, *transformations, deviations and devaluations* of modern architecture had found their way to many other areas of the world' (my emphasis) (Curtis 2009 [1982]: 491).

Reacting against this derogatory historical inscription, Latin American architects in the late 1970s began to critique the concept of architectural modernism, and to articulate a collective argument about its significance on the continent. The movement was initiated mainly by practitioners (rather than historians or academics) who were interested in interpreting their own work in relation to their predecessors. Their writings sparked academic groups, theory courses, and international seminars across the continent. Since then, Latin Americans have examined the concept of modern architecture in an attempt to forge their own national and continental identities. Rather than seeing themselves as a part of a tradition already claimed by others, Latin American architects asserted their creative independence. The 1980s and 1990s were especially exciting for this reflection, though they did not have significant international impact because most of the writings were produced in Spanish and Portuguese, and their focus was on their own approach.

More recently, the debate has shifted from establishing national and architectural identities to examining how the discourse about modernism excluded the buildings and sites where most Latin Americans live. Given the current condition of Latin American cities, growing interest in urgent issues to do with poverty and architectural informality has displaced debates about modernism, sidelining it in the search for practical solutions.

This essay analyzes three key perspectives which dominate the narrative of architectural Latin American modernism: a body of work promoted largely by the US government and its cultural and educational institutions; the reappropriation of that work by Latin American architects in the 1980s; and the contemporary questioning of modernism's legacy in the context of urban realities.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY INTER-AMERICAN POLITICS AND DISSEMINATION OF MODERNISM

The historiography of Latin American modernism is tied to the US government and various cultural and academic institutions there. The Museum of Modern Art in New York (MOMA) is one of the most influential institutions in the creation of the modernist Latin American identity, not least through the Brazil Builds exhibition in 1943 (catalogue by Phillip Goodwin), and the subsequent Latin American Architecture since 1945, held in 1955 (with a book written by Henry Russell-Hitchcock). The exhibitions, and the two volumes, significantly affected how international audiences saw architecture in Latin America. Latin America was presented as a forward-looking proponent of the principles of the modern movement in architecture in service of socio-economic development. The architects and buildings displayed constitute the core of what is now commonly accepted as Latin American modernism. They remain at the centre of discussions on twentieth-century Latin American architecture today (see Fraser 2000; Brillembourg 2004; del Real and Gyger 2012). Given these two exhibitions' influence, many contemporary theorists argue that the modernist identity is a US cultural construct. While the exhibitions brought attention to architecture in Latin America, they also highlighted the success of US foreign policy intervention,

showcasing the influence of North American culture, education, and technology. Contemporary theorists of this perspective strive to reveal the often-obscure ways modernism spread around the world from 1930–60. As Duanfang Lu maintains,

modernism travelled in the name of knowledge transfer, overseas aid, and new forms of cooperation among newly independent countries [...] successful modernist design proved effective in helping the nations that offered it to create expanded spaces in the global political arena, as well as bringing international recognition and faster-paced modernisation to the host societies.

(2011: 9)

Although Lu refers primarily to Africa and Asia, her argument opens up possibilities for overturning traditional architectural historiography, wherein architectural modernism flows from European masters to talented pupils who adopt and implement their masters' ideas in their own countries.

In Latin America, the figure of Nelson Rockefeller is illustrative, and remains unaddressed in any of the major historical accounts of Latin American architecture.³ With Creole Petroleum – the Venezuelan subsidiary of Standard Oil – as one of the world's largest oil producers, Rockefeller had strong business interests in Latin America. In 1939, after becoming president of MOMA, Rockefeller expressed to US President Roosevelt his concern that Latin America was at risk of being controlled by Nazi Germany. Roosevelt named Rockefeller Coordinator of the Office of Inter-American Affairs and entrusted him with overseeing programmes of cooperation with the countries of Latin America. In 1942, Brazil allowed the United States to set up bases in three cities (Bahia, Pernambuco, and Natal) in return for investment in the iron industry. This resulted in several German attacks on Brazilian ships on the Atlantic, causing Brazil to declare war on Germany and Italy. This stimulated further cooperation between the United States and Brazil with a focus on modernizing Brazil's industrial and urban infrastructure. In 1943, the firm Town Planning Associates⁴ was commissioned to design *Cidade dos Motores*, a new industrial city for 25,000 people approximately 25 miles from Rio de Janeiro. According to Costa and Hartray, the firm received the commission due to its connections with the US State Department: funding for the project came from Brazil's joining the war on the Allies' side – which, in turn, guaranteed large loans from the Imports-Exports Bank to be used in industrial development projects (Costa and Hartray 1997: 50).

Costa and Hartray do not provide details about the alleged close links between Town Planning Associates and the US State Department, but Kahatt demonstrates that the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs wrote to Paul Lester Wiener in 1945, confirming Wiener's three-month lecture tour to Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru (Kahatt 2011: 90). After Wiener, other prominent architects like Richard Neutra and Josep Lluís Sert – and historians such as Henry Russell-Hitchcock – visited Latin America, sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of State and the Office of Inter-American Affairs. Town Planning Associates received large commissions in all the countries they visited.

Such trips need to be examined through multiple perspectives. There is the enthusiasm of a young generation of architects across Latin America, many of whom had been trained in Europe and the United States, and who believed that the modernist

ideas of Le Corbusier, Sert, and Neutra would benefit their countries. Then there is the American government's interest in spreading modernisation and democracy. Democracy would guarantee socio-political stability, under the auspices of the United States, while modernization would bring economic benefits. But traditional accounts about the development of modernist architecture in Latin America have failed fully to explore the political pressure exercised by the US government to adopt a particular architectural and planning style as part of a much larger package.⁵ Adopting North American forms of modernization required Latin American countries to take loans from American banks to purchase equipment, to pay for patents on construction materials such as cement, and to train local people at Canadian and American universities. Rockefeller thus emerges as pivotal: the institutions he represented are tightly connected with promoting modernist architectural ideas, funding infrastructural projects, and exhibiting those projects in the United States. Thus, behind the discourse of neighbourly cooperation, democracy and progress lay the conditions to guarantee Latin American dependence on the United States. While modernization brought social benefits to the locals, the sponsors of modernization benefitted much more.

MODERNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'AN IDENTITY'

The buildings considered most representative of Latin American modernism were built, recognized historically, and showcased in this context of political persuasion, running from the 1930s to the late 1950s. The two exhibitions' content provides yet further support for the claim that Latin American modernist identities are a USA construct. This evidence appears most forcefully in the books that followed the exhibitions: *Construção Brasileira: Arquitetura Moderna e Antiga* [*Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942*], by Philip Goodwin, and *Latin American Architecture since 1945*, by Henry Russell-Hitchcock.

Brazil Builds has two sections. The first contains a wide variety of colonial buildings, while the second focuses on modern architecture. The introduction recognizes the importance of the political dimension: 'in spring of 1942 [MOMA and American Institute of Architects (AIA)] were both anxious to have a closer relationship with Brazil, a country which was soon to be our ally' (Goodwin 1943: 7). The introduction also states that while 'the colonial was widely photographed the modern was not at all' (7). The exhibition's main purpose was to recognize advances in modern architecture, which had been ignored. If one accepts Goodwin's statement, his book marks the first inscription of Brazilian modernism in architectural history.

Since colonial architecture had already been photographed, the relevant section shows a lacklustre inventory of churches, palaces, farmhouses and some early educational buildings without much ado. It does, however, highlight the distinctiveness of local interpretations of the European styles (principally the baroque) and the characteristics of colonial vernacular. The section on modernism is much more celebratory and rich in detail. Explanatory texts for each building focus on technical issues such as the use of materials (mainly reinforced concrete) and environmental solutions to heat and glare; an aspect, the author insists, that had been 'blandly ignored by North American architects' (Goodwin 1943: 97). Goodwin praises the

architectural elegance and technical inventiveness of government and office buildings, multi-story housing blocks, infrastructure (airports and stadia), educational buildings, and social housing.

Critique only appears at the end of the book, referring not to the architecture but to three larger issues: (1) lack of transport infrastructure (i.e. poor roads and no highways); (2) lack of housing; and (3) inadequate architectural education (Goodwin 1943: 96). About education the book remarks that ‘the new architecture has come to stay in Brazil, and it will demand a very different type of training than that which has been offered by Brazil’s academically minded schools of the *Belas Artes*’ (102). These three aspects highlight the need for modernization, a solution that requires large capital investment; thus, the critique asserts the importance of economic relations with the United States. Praise of modern architecture in Brazil both celebrates Brazilian architects’ creativity and demonstrates that Canadian and US ideas lead to much-needed socio-political and economic development. The comment about education is crucial and strategic in promoting United States–Brazil relations. It renders inadequate the Beaux Arts European tradition of architectural education, indicating that US institutions are better suited to train architects capable of maintaining the pace of modernization. Following the end of the Second World War, American universities became more attractive than French ones, and were preferred by young affluent boys wanting to become architects. These young men generated another source of income for North American institutions within the frame of neighbourly cooperation. *Brazil Builds* commends Brazilian modern architectural production while indicating why the United States is the best partner for Brazil to achieve the goal of modernization.

Latin American Architecture since 1945, published 17 years later by Henry Russell-Hitchcock, continues largely in the same vein, although it expands the sample to the rest of the continent. Russell-Hitchcock struggles to make the point that Latin America is a heterogeneous entity difficult to consider as a totality. In spite of the material and qualitative differences he points out,⁶ Russell-Hitchcock notes an unmistakable stylistic commonality across all the samples: they all correspond to the aesthetic principles of the International Style, set 23 years earlier at MOMA when Russell-Hitchcock and Philip Johnson curated the International Style exhibition. Like the previous book, *Latin American Architecture since 1945* significantly affected the construction of a modernist body of work in the continent. In spite of the limited sample of buildings (many more had been built in the same style, and there are important omissions), these became a reference for judging architectural production throughout Latin America. As such, international celebration of the work produced by Latin American architects at such prestigious institutions as MOMA encouraged a young generation to embrace the modernist aesthetic. By the late 1940s, modernism had become the only option for young architects wishing to succeed; not being modernist implied being backward, outcasts in a rapidly growing profession during a construction boom.

Note that reviewing modernism under a critical lens does not take away the values inherent in the buildings themselves. The buildings continue to be architecturally worthy and remain important precedents in the development of national and continental architectures. Nor does criticism undermine modernist architects’ technical and/or creative abilities: they were talented, resourceful, and politically

astute. However, historical revision is fundamental to understanding how Latin American architectural modernism was constructed. Politicizing its construction allows us to overcome the provoking simplicity of dominant historiographies. If only ‘transformations, deviations and devaluations of modern architecture found their way to other parts of the world’, it is necessary to ask how such decadence occurred (Curtis 2000 [1982]: 491). If my earlier emphasis was on the derogatory in Curtis’s account, I now focus on the inaccuracy of the colloquialism ‘found their way’, an expression that occludes the realities of the process of architectural knowledge transmission, as well as the utilitarianism of architectural history. Architecture did not find its way alone; there were agents of transmission, and those agents were architects themselves, the masters, who willingly joined a large political apparatus to disseminate their ideas. Inspecting historical contradictions (Curtis’s derogation contradicts Goodwin and Russell-Hitchcock’s enthusiasm), and analyzing historical texts and the socio-political circumstances surrounding modernism’s dissemination to Latin America lets us review its legacy; for until now priority has been given merely to the formal aspects of the movement.

ARCHITECTS IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

The terms in which Latin American architects approached modernism’s legacy changed in the 1980s. Rather than accepting uncritically a system of representation mediated by North American, and European institutions, Latin American architects developed their own interpretations of how they had appropriated the modern movement, and allegedly transformed it. Interest in studying themselves was largely motivated by Kenneth Frampton’s *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Frampton’s book dominated architectural debates in Latin America until the late 1990s. His interpretation of Critical Regionalism, especially the idea that ‘mixing traditions’ could be understood as a form of resistance against the advance of universalization, gave architects on the continent an opportunity to conceive an identity for themselves: an identity neither European nor pre-Columbian, which carried connotations of backwardness. The feeling of ‘being modern’ could therefore be fully embraced in the sense of a progression from pre-Columbian and colonial backwardness, and a diversion from the modern European norm.

Before the end of the decade, the Chilean architect Enrique Browne published his seminal book, *Otra Arquitectura Latinoamericana* [*Other Latin American Architecture*] (1988), embracing Frampton’s underlying thesis. Browne’s book marked a turning point in Latin American architectural academia. Like Russell-Hitchcock, Browne highlights differences across the continent, but finds also that there is a certain unity. In this case, unity is not merely stylistic (as in Russell-Hitchcock), but appears in the architects’ attitude and the terms of their formal adaptations. For Browne, *Other Architecture* is truly modern and appropriate for Latin America because it responds to the specific socio-economic, physical, and cultural aspects of its locations. Throughout, Browne tries to dissociate Latin American buildings that ‘look modern’ – i.e. the buildings such as those shown in *Architecture since 1945* – from their predecessors in Europe and North America. Browne attempts, with only partial success, to prove that in spite of being similar, they are different. He shows that many Latin American architects appropriated local

traditions and adapted the forms of the international style to respond to local environmental and seismic conditions in their countries. Adaptation was, therefore, technical – the use of local materials and construction techniques by unskilled labourers – and formal: awnings and overhangs, trellises for cross ventilation, etc. In this, Browne advanced from the superficial analyses of Goodwin and Russell-Hitchcock, but never addressed fully the socio-political aspects he was arguing for.

After exploring the historical dissemination of modernist architecture through Latin America, Browne proposes that the modern movement in architecture arrived in Latin America before architects were ready. He thus subscribes to a progressivist position that sees modernization as a process leading to a desired state of modernity and, indeed, that all societies are heading in the same direction. For him, twentieth-century architects wrestled with modern architectural discourse and practice: first with form (1930–45) and then with technical and functional issues (1945–70). He then argues that only in the 1970s were Latin American architects capable of appropriating modern architecture critically. He develops his argument along the lines of Frampton's Critical Regionalism, particularly the idea that a critical regionalist architecture moves away from 'both the normative optimization and from the naïve utopianism of the early Modern Movement' (Frampton 2007 [1980]: 327). Browne struggles genuinely to present an argument in favour of difference, supporting the idea that architecture in Latin America stands for 'Otherness' within the modern movement.

CONCLUSION

The animated debates about Latin American modernism are closely related to the conceptual difficulties of addressing the difference between modernity and modernism in architectural history. Modernization, on the other hand, causes less confusion. Addressing these three concepts offers an opportunity to advance the debate about the origin, influence, and legacy of Latin American modernism. I contend that the separation between modernity (as a social condition and a world order) and modernism (as an architectural movement and, later, a style) turns architecture into an endogenous system supported by a singular history whose only purpose is to validate itself through a list of precedents, buildings which are taken to contain the values that differentiate modern architecture from its others. This method has conditioned the history of architectural Latin American modernism, limiting our understanding of the modern movement to a handful of examples that demonstrate the continent's entry into modernity (even if presented as a different modernity, like Browne claims). I have argued that such a careful selection of buildings maintains a sense of historical cohesion at the expense of broader, determining, socio-political aspects.

If architectural modernism is understood somewhat like Hilde Heynen's argument that it arises when architects agree that a particular set of forms is the 'legitimate answer to the experience of modernity and the problems and possibilities resulting from the process of modernization', then we must focus on the experiences of modernity and processes of modernization before sanctioning the legitimate answer to such issues (1999: 26). Early twentieth-century modernization, and the construction of infrastructure, brought benefits to people in many Latin American countries, but it also exacerbated socio-economic disparity – both within individual countries and between Latin America and the so-called developed world. That is why I have stressed

the political agendas behind modernization, indicating that modernization brought greater benefits to the sponsors than it did to the beneficiaries. Further studies are necessary to establish the precise effects of exhibitions (like those at MOMA) and books (like those written by Goodwin and Russell-Hitchcock) on reinforcing an exploitative relation between the United States and Latin America. Careful study of these underlying politico-economic agendas will facilitate understanding of the processes that led to the current urban conditions of cities in the continent, and the wide range of architectures that have proliferated in them.

Goodwin's enthusiastic affirmation that Brazilian architecture 'carried the evolution of the whole movement some steps forward towards full development of the ideas launched in Europe and North America' (Goodwin 1943: 103) encourages us to expand the meaning of modernism to include the realities that traditional historiography occludes and condemns. Browne's optimistic notion of otherness opens up doors to include 'other' practices outside the narrow realm architectural history has created. The architecture of the slums, the self-built houses and apartments of the vast middle-income population, and the everyday appropriations of public spaces by vendors all express the problems and possibilities of modernization: that is Latin American modernism. There, we find the development of the modern movement to which Goodwin refers. Those architectures represent the socio-political basis of that otherness which Browne failed to address. That is where modernism is enhanced, expanded, and maximized by an exploitative, uneven modernisation. Those are the spaces where Latin Americans form our own experience of modernity. This is not to say that we ought to accept and refrain from improving pitiable urban conditions – criminality, environmental risk, disruption, etc.: illegality must be prevented. Similarly, all people deserve decent living conditions. Even so, and however deplorable they are, those urban and architectural expressions are part of the Latin American modernity and, therefore, must be addressed critically.

Twentieth-century modernism will continue to be relevant to architectural history, in and outside Latin America. Architects such as Barragán, Dieste, Niemeyer, Salmona, and Villanueva, among others, have created work that deserves further international recognition and requires continued study. They worked through an important period in Latin American history and made a significant contribution, but their work is not democratically representative. It represents only part of a tradition, a movement that has been narratively and univocally constructed. Today, we have the opportunity to revise that tradition, to democratize modernism, to include a much broader set of practices and experiences of modernity. This revision is already transforming the concept of modernism in the context of Latin America, and carrying the movement many steps forward.

NOTES

1. I refer here to Gideon's usage of the term 'architectural tradition' in order to avoid qualifying the modern movement in architecture as a 'style', a concept he rejects. See Gideon (xxxii-lvi).
2. By scholars in Europe, Canada, and America, I refer not only to nationals of countries there, but also to Latin Americans who work there.
3. For example, Curtis, Frampton, Browne, or Arango.

4. An architectural firm based in New York whose partners were Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Weiner.
5. The participation of US governmental institutions in disseminating modernist architectural ideas through Latin America is relatively well known (see e.g. Bergdoll, Cavalcanti, del Real and Gyger, and Kahatt), but not fully studied.
6. Russell-Hitchcock argues that the quality of construction in Colombia is higher than in other parts of the continent, and that certain countries rely on concrete while others use brick.

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CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

RACIALIZED DANCE MODERNISMS IN LUSOPHONE AND SPANISH-SPEAKING LATIN AMERICA



Jose Luis Reynoso

This paper surveys the development of modernist dance practices during the twentieth century in various countries in what is referred to as ‘Latin America’.¹ During this period many countries in the region faced the conundrum of building nation-states characterized by an indigenized national identity while also making efforts to constitute themselves as participants in the development of Western modernity. By tracing histories of ballet and modern dance in relationship to Latin American indigenous and Africanist popular expressive cultures, I examine the role that race and social class have played in the formation of discourses on Western cultural modernity and its concomitant neocolonialist implications.

During part of the nineteenth and twentieth century, cultural debates in the context of Latin America centred on whether ‘high’ modernism reproduced or challenged European and US imperialist colonialism in the region. In reality, Latin American ‘high’ modernist cultural production often performed these two functions simultaneously. Dance practices that combined ballet and modern dance with indigenous and Africanist expressive cultures participated in constructing hybrid national subjectivities that embodied both ‘culturally marked’ Latin American artistic practices and what is often assumed as ‘unmarked’ whiteness as representative of the ‘universal’. I hope this discussion furthers our understanding of the de-racialization of colonized subjectivities. Whiteness often stands as the representative of a pre-supposed ‘universal’ human experience as mere instances, of cultural particularity, while a dynamic that reifies the supremacy of whiteness as the organizing principle in the production of Western cultural modernity discourses and practices.

IDEOLOGICAL TERRAINS FOR BUILDING NATIONALIST DANCE STAGES

After the conquest and colonization of much of what is known as Latin America, mostly by Spain and by Portugal in the case of Brazil during the sixteenth century, a series of independence movements ensued across the region during the 1800s. People such as Venezuelan Simón Bolívar and Cuban José Martí led and inspired pan-Latin-Americanist movements that stood against European and US imperialism.

While Bolívar's and Martí's anti-colonial projects were intended to be racially inclusive, at least discursively, and sometimes verged on essentialism, other influential figures such as Argentinean Domingo Faustino Sarmiento articulated their contrasting views by embracing an unapologetic Darwinian racial determinism. Sarmiento held that

It may be very unjust to exterminate savages, suffocate rising civilizations, conquer peoples who are in possession of a privileged piece of land. But thanks to these injustices, America, instead of remaining abandoned to the savages, incapable of progress, is today occupied by the Caucasian race – the most perfect, the most intelligent, the most beautiful and most progressive of those that people the earth [...] the world is subject to revolutions that recognize immutable laws; the strong races exterminate the weak ones and the civilized peoples supplant the savages in the possession of the earth.

(qtd. in Fernández Retamar 1989: 24)

These are some of the colonial and anti-colonial legacies that shaped Latin American racial politics and the production of imaginaries of modernity as local and visiting artists circulated throughout the Americas.

CHOREOGRAPHING HYBRID NATIONALISMS, DANCING LATIN AMERICAN MODERNITIES

Events related first to the First World War and later to the Second World War prompted ballet and modern dance artists from Europe and the United States to tour across the American continent and for many to adopt American countries as their new home. As embodiments of white Western cultural modernity, ballet and modern dance were embraced in the formation of syncretic modernisms integral to nation formation in various Latin American countries. Maria José Cifuentes asserts that Chile experienced 'the need to create a cultural and intellectual identity that could enact the values declared by the new Republic' and, after a long history with opera and ballet, to institute the latter as a 'national art' (2007: 46).² According to Cifuentes, it was the famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova who revived an interest for classical ballet in Chile during her visits to the country in 1917 and 1918. Jan Kawesky, one of Pavlova's dancers, decided to stay in Chile and founded a classical ballet academy that represented the first attempt at providing formal dance training in a nationalist context. This effort led directly to the formation of a professional dance group in 1935 (Cifuentes 2007). In the 1940s, Ernst Uthoff along with Lola Botka and Rudolf Pescht, who arrived in Chile in 1939 with German Dance Theatre choreographer Kurt Jooss, directed the state-sponsored School of Dance. Providing mostly training based on principles of ballet and German modern dance (*Ausdruckstanz*), the dance school produced the first generation of professional dancers who integrated the National Ballet of Chile founded in 1945 and who eventually developed modern dance in the country. Some of these artists combined ballet and modern dance idioms with indigenous themes and dance vocabularies. Chilean choreographer Patricio Bunster, for instance, developed a dance technique based on Chilean indigenous dances and his training

in *Ausdruckstanz*. His hybrid training regimen was influential in the formation of professional dancers not only in Chile but also in East Germany.³

While on tour in South America, Pavlova and her company also performed in Argentina. Although her presence fuelled an interest for classical ballet, the modern innovations of the Ballets Russes, which had visited the country in 1913, had greater influence in developing a taste for modernist ballet in the capital, Buenos Aires (Tambutti 2000).⁴ Previously trained in the teachings of Mary Wigman, one of the most influential figures in the development of German modern dance, Renate Schottelius landed in Argentina in 1936 where she later remembered, ‘there was no modern dance whatsoever’ (qtd. in Reinhart 1997: 46).⁵ Schottelius took ballet classes at the National Conservatory in Buenos Aires and eventually began dancing with Miriam Winslow, a modern dance choreographer from the United States. In 1943, Winslow founded her dance company and began training Argentinean dancers, many of whom became influential in developing modern dance in the country during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1962, a group of choreographers and critics, including Schottelius, founded the Friends of Dance Association with the aim of providing a space for established and emerging Argentinean choreographers interested in developing a ‘unique’ dance style (Moyano 2006). Among the emerging young choreographers were Lia Labarone, Susana Zimmerman, and Oscar Araiz who ‘experimented’ with indigenous themes and eventually directed the first official Argentinean modern dance company, Ballet del Teatro General San Martín, in 1968.⁶

Historical accounts of the development of dance modernism in Argentina seem to concur on the absence of any significant indigenous influence. Susana Tambutti (2000) acknowledges that the first generations of Argentinean choreographers explored themes based on folklore, autochthonous, and creole rural traditions but she implicitly categorizes these practices as ‘regionalism’, a ‘difficulty’ that had to be overcome by formalist abstractionism. While discussing why modern dance from Europe and the United States was so easily embraced in Buenos Aires ‘without any type of cultural resistance’, Marcelo Isse Moyano asserts that local culture – meaning black and Indian – was ‘almost inexistent’ due to military campaigns carried out first during the ‘triple alliance’ war held by Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil against Paraguay (1864–70) and later during the ‘Conquest of the Desert’ (1870) (Moyano 2006: 11). Moyano concludes that because of this ‘almost inexistent’ indigenous presence, Argentina had in its ‘origins’ and historical development Europe as a ‘mirror’ through which the country was reflected and constructed its own character (2006: 11–12). The ‘disappearance’ of the indigenous from Argentina’s racial imaginaries undoubtedly contributed to what Victoria Fortuna identifies as the production of narratives of Argentina ‘as exceptionally white, European, and cosmopolitan amongst Latin American nations’ (Fortuna 2013: 43). Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s eugenics certainly contributed towards creating these narratives as his racial politics resonated with the aforementioned military campaigns overlapping his presidency (1868–74). It seems that the violence of erasing racial ‘Others’ in efforts to *imagine* Argentina as ‘exceptionally white, European, and cosmopolitan’ during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may be reproduced by attempts to historicize early Argentinean concert dance within a discourse of aesthetic sophistication predicated purely on whiteness.

Certainly, dancers embodied racial narratives and enacted them as they danced on stages across geographical borders during the twentieth century. Isadora Duncan, an influential figure in the development of modern dance in the United States and Europe, found in 1916 that the Argentinean public was ‘cold, heavy, [and] unappreciative’ while in Uruguay audiences responded ‘wild with enthusiasm’, surely a reinvigorating experience as she continued on tour in Brazil (Duncan 1995 [1927]: 222–3). Upon her arrival in Bahia, Duncan asserted that it was the ‘first time’ that she had seen ‘the mixture of black and white races taken with nonchalance’ and was seemingly amazed that the ‘whole city’ ‘teemed with the[ir] promiscuous love’ (231). Her astonishment was underscored by her own racial prejudices as reflected in her response to the ‘cold, heavy, unappreciative’ Argentinean audiences. She reportedly stopped a performance and claimed that ‘South Americans did not know anything about art’, and apparently equating blackness with unsophistication shouted at them, “‘you are of the blacks’” (qtd. in Fortuna 2013: 45).⁷

The racial mixture Duncan witnessed in the streets of Bahia played out selectively in Brazil’s processes of modernization. Rio de Janeiro’s prestigious opera house, the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro, became part of the dance touring international circuit when in 1913 the Ballets Russes performed there, followed by Duncan in 1916 as well as Pavlova in 1918. In 1936, the Municipal Theatre established its first state-sponsored *corps de ballet*, which was briefly directed by Russian dancer-choreographer Nina Verchinina in the mid-1950s.⁸ According to Cristina Rosa ballet technique became established in Brazil as the primary means for training dancers performing Brazilian-themed choreographies (Rosa 2010). Local cultural productions such as samba and capoeira, if not properly ‘refined’ by ballet-trained bodies, were ‘promoted’ on the margins, away from what could be referred to as ‘modern’.⁹ While some amongst the Brazilian bourgeoisie may have desired the erasure of any Africanist aesthetic traces, from subtle to vigorous variations of hip-shaking, in samba and capoeira, others sought to ‘refine’ these forms of cultural production in ways that they could exist with, or *because of*, ballet and thus be integrated into variations of national yet modernized identities.¹⁰

Ana Paula Höfling notes that as Brazil’s nationalist modernization was shaped under military governance during the 1970s, the official mandate for the preservation of ‘national “patrimony”’ was to include “‘artistic and literary creations most representative of the Brazilian creative spirit’” (qtd. in Höfling 2012: 181). In this context, the Brazilian contemporary dance company, Grupo Corpo, under choreographer Rodrigo Pedeneiras, developed a dance vocabulary founded on ballet principles and aesthetics, but that often privileged the hips as the source from which movement initiated (Rosa 2010).¹¹ In ‘modernizing’ her Conjunto Folclórico Viva Bahia in 1972, Emília Biancardi Ferreira renamed her company the Ballet Folclórico Viva Bahia and started a collaboration with Carlos Moraes, a dancer-choreographer trained in ballet, modern, and ‘primitive’ dances (Höfling 2012: 198). While Moraes contributed with the ‘modernizing’ elements of ballet and modern dance to Biancardi’s already stylized ‘folklorism’, he gained exposure to Afro-Brazilian folk traditions on which he relied as sources for his own ballet-based choreographic works as director of the Ballet Brasileiro de Bahia (Höfling 2012).

Class and race also played a key role in cultural production shaped within the context of nationalist politics at various moments in the history of Cuba, a country

also visited by Pavlova. After intervening in Cuba's war of independence against Spain in 1898, the United States took control over the island. In this context, anti-imperialists embraced African and Spanish influences in the construction of *cubanidad*, Cuban national identity. However, intellectuals such as Alberto Arredondo dismissed these integrative efforts as a fad and advocated instead for a 'process of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) towards achieving a unified national identity' (Loomis 1999: 2–3). In 1918, a group of upper-class Havana women founded the Pro-Arte Musical Society to promote European classical music, ballet, and theatre (Tomé 2011: 67). As Fernando Alonso – one of the founders of Cuban ballet – remembers, even untalented students who enjoyed high social status 'were given special consideration and pampered to the greatest extent possible' (qtd. in Singer 2013: 14). In 1948, Fernando Alonso, his wife Alicia, and his brother Alberto founded the Ballet Alicia Alonso, which ultimately succumbed to the increasingly repressive pressure by the US-supported dictatorial regime of colonel Fulgencio Batista in the mid-1950s (Singer 2013).

In 1959, a contingent of Cubans and allies led by Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista regime and the development of ballet and modern dance in the island took a new direction. With full financial support from Castro's regime, the Alonsos led the National Ballet of Cuba, whose repertoire included dances with local cultural themes along with European classical ballets. The company also began recruiting more 'Afro-Cubans', a striking departure from the Pro-Arte Musical Society's School of Dance, which had traditionally catered to the Eurocentric taste of its mostly white bourgeois membership base. With a similar revolutionary and racially integrative mandate the Department of Modern Dance was founded under the direction of Ramiro Guerra. A manifesto published during the initial phases of Guerra's modern dance efforts expressed that Cuba's modern dance was to

explore the island's myths and foreign ancestors who germinated in the Caribbean melting pot and to have a vision of the past with present-day tools to build a future. To [give] an individual form [...] a universal character without picturesqueness [...] Be linked to the land, but with a contemporary cosmopolitan air.

(cited in Mendez Martinez 2009)

The statement reflected the desire to integrate racialized local expressive practices and universalist, cosmopolitan discourses associated with racially 'unmarked' Western modernity. In this context, Guerra developed a modern dance technique that became known internationally as *la técnica cubana* (Cuban technique), 'a highly evolved hybrid of ballet, modern dance, and Afro-Cuban folklore' (John 2001: 87). Guerra's work set the foundation for future generations of modern dance groups and choreographers.¹²

Earlier in the twentieth century, modernist dance practices in Mexico developed, as in Cuba, in a context of revolutionary politics. However, unlike Cuba, Mexico's syncretic dance practices excluded any direct link to Africanist influences and instead privileged the inclusion of the indigenous Indian, the folk, and the popular. In 1910, an armed insurrection set in motion a sociopolitical, economic, and cultural revolution in the country. Early in 1919, when some factions within the armed revolutionary

movement were still active in some parts of the country, Pavlova arrived in Mexico after her last engagement in Havana, Cuba. As in other Latin American cities, Pavlova arrived in Mexico City as a universalized referent of high culture whose ballet repertoire embodied values and interests of international, Europeanized classes around the world. With the collaboration of Mexican artists, Pavlova mounted a series of Mexican folk dances of which *El Jarabe Tapatío* was the centrepiece because Pavlova danced it en pointe. What had been previously despised by the Mexican bourgeoisie as mere entertainment for the masses became, via Pavlova, a cultural symbol of what modern Mexico could be – the embodiment of the ‘universal’ and the local.¹³

During the 1920s, folk dances gained popularity among the elites as some dance artists and teachers continued using ballet to ‘refine’ popular dances. In 1929, Nellie and Gloria Campobello left one of those dance groups led by Lettie Carroll, a US immigrant, and launched their own careers as dancers, choreographers, and teachers to become influential in the institutionalization of professional dance education in Mexico during the 1930s.¹⁴ By 1939, however, Carlos Mérida, a government official and fervent dance advocate, claimed that ballet was anachronistic. He called instead for the integration of modern dance techniques from the North into training regiments at the National School of Dance then directed by Nellie Campobello.

Invited under different circumstances by the Mexican government in 1940, Anna Sokolow and Waldeen Falkeinstein, two US dancer-choreographers, led the first two state-funded modern dance companies in the country.¹⁵ Sokolow initially associated her artistic pursuits in collaboration with Spanish expatriates in Mexico and took Spain’s struggles against fascism as the source for choreographing dances with universal themes. Contrastingly, Waldeen took Mexico’s cultural and revolutionary history as an artistic source with equal universalizing potential. While Sokolow and her Mexican and Spanish artistic associates choreographed their first and most celebrated collaboration, *Don Lindo de Almería*, a dance based on scenes from life in the Andalusian region of Spain, Waldeen combined abstracted movement with elements from Mexican folk dances and imagery in what has been considered the first Mexican modern dance piece, *La Coronela*, a dance portraying a revolutionary struggle led by a militant female colonel.¹⁶

Sokolow’s and Waldeen’s claims to engaging in distinctive approaches to ‘universalist’ modern dance practices in Mexico engendered debates that reflected questions that other countries in Latin America faced during the twentieth century. As many locals travelled around the world and as these countries welcomed artists from Europe and the United States, a mélange of local and foreign aesthetic discourses and practices became integral to the formation of modern nation-states and distinctive notions of what constituted, or not, legitimate modern art forms that could be associated with Western cultural modernity.

DANCING BACKWARD, TO THE SIDES, FORWARD

Debates on whether high modernism reproduced and/or challenged European and US imperialist colonialism in Latin America have often produced spaces of ontological simultaneity. Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera seems to allude to such a space while assessing Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam’s work as

the first vision ever of modern art from the standpoint of Africa within Latin America[...]representing] a synthesis that might be endorsed by modernity, thus creating a non-Western space within the Western tradition, decentralizing it, transforming and de-Europeanizing it.

(qtd. in Loomis 1999: 4)

John A. Loomis notes that Lam's work 'is unique in how it *transcends* the specifics of iconography to penetrate the *essence* of Afro-Cuban culture from within' (my emphasis) (1999: 4). 'Transcending' the iconography of a national specificity in favour of an abstracted representation of its 'essence' certainly resonated with universalist modernist discourses engendered by debates and dance practices in various parts of Latin America during the twentieth century.

However, the work of these dance artists simultaneously represented a challenge to the transcendentalist aesthetic essentialism Loomis values in Lam's work. These nationalist syncretic dance practices questioned the ostensibly neutral racial politics of such essentialist abstractionism that implicitly reified the supremacy of unmarked whiteness in the production of Western cultural modernity as a colonialist discourse. While still engaging the colonial modernist master narrative of universalism, these artists sought 'universal' resonances in the culturally specific even when doing so meant auto-exoticizing themselves and/or others.¹⁷

As dancers relied on ballet, modern dance, and indigenous and Africanist forms of expressive culture while participating in the formation of hybrid national identities, they simultaneously naturalized hierarchies of racialized class relations while also marking and indigenizing whiteness. Without nostalgia for the past in an era of 'post'-coloniality, these radically syncretic dance modernisms may help us trace discursive trajectories informing 'post'-nation-state contemporary art practices developed within a neoliberal transnationalism that has contributed to perpetuate the unequal effects that globalization has had on the lives of people of different nationalities, races, social classes, sexualities, and gender identities throughout Latin America. Tracing such discursive genealogies can help us understand the role of dance in the production of racial and social formations as bodies enact embodiments of self and Otherness, as individuals, as artists, as nationals, and as transnational subjects.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of 'Latinity' as a colonial construct and the neocolonial implications of its continued use in the term 'Latin America', see Mignolo.
2. Translations from sources written in Spanish are my own.
3. For more on Bunster's work see 'Bunster, Patricio' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming).
4. For a comprehensive history on how the Ballets Russes 'modernized' ballet at the turn of the twentieth century, see Garafola.
5. For a discussion of Wigman's influential role in the development of modern dance in Germany and the United States, see Manning.
6. For more on Araiz's work, see 'Araiz, Oscar' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming).

7. For a discussion of Duncan's influence in the development of modern dance, and her racial politics, see Daly.
8. For more on Verchinina's work in Brazil, see 'Verchinina, Nina' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming).
9. For an introduction to capoeira, see 'Capoeira' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming). For a more detailed history of capoeira in Brazil's nationalist modernization and its relation to Brazilian 'folklore' and the tourist industry, see Höfling.
10. For a discussion on how embodied Africanist aesthetics constitute *ginga* as repertoires of bodily syncopation central to Afro-Brazilian subjectivity and bodily practices such as samba, capoeira, and Grupo Corpo's contemporary dance, see Rosa.
11. For more on the work of Pedeneiras, see 'Pedeneiras, Rodrigo' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming). For a more detailed account on Pedeneiras' work with *Grupo Corpo*, see Rosa (2010: 276–378).
12. To learn about one of these dancers and how she expanded on Guerra's work, see *Boán, Mariana* in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming).
13. For a discussion of Pavlova's visit to Mexico City, see Reynoso (2012: 22–149).
14. For more on the work of Nellie and Gloria Campobello, see 'Campobello, Nellie and Gloria', in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (forthcoming). See also Reynoso (2012: 181–209).
15. Falkeinstein has always been known as Waldeen. I will honour that tradition here.
16. For a comparative discussion of Sokolow's and Waldeen's work in Mexico, see Reynoso (2012: 210–93).
17. For a lucid discussion on the role of auto/exoticism as part of colonizing enterprises, see Savigliano.

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

LATIN AMERICA'S MULTIPLE LITERARY MODERNISMS

—♦—
Emily McGinn

Modernism in Latin America presents a problem of nomenclature. The term *modernismo* was coined by Rubén Darío in his call for a new poetics at the turn of the twentieth century, and despite the fact that it is a direct cognate of 'modernism', it does not map directly onto Anglo-American modernisms. To talk of Latin American modernisms means to include both *modernismo* and the array of vanguard movements that take up a similar charge to reinvent, make new, and re-energize literary form in the modernist era. The artists and thinkers included here share affinities with their European modernist counterparts in their desire for art and literature to reflect and include the new reality of an industrial, mechanized world, through an artistic expression attuned to that changing cultural and historical scene.

In the wake of the final collapse of the Spanish empire with the loss of Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898 to the emerging industrial hegemon of the United States, and faced with a sense of cultural retreat, *modernismo* is a hemispheric literary movement that harnessed the innovations of disparate authors and contexts. The *modernismo* movement takes its lead from a variety of distinct influences, including French symbolism and the Parnassians, the radical transformations of the Castilian poetic tradition offered by Spanish and Latin American romantics, and the American gothic tradition. Rubén Darío, as a Nicaraguan who had travelled extensively and worked primarily out of Buenos Aires, was well positioned to be the spokesperson of *modernismo* and find solidarity across national borders for a larger continental community. Although Darío never wrote a formal manifesto, preferring to leave the category open and as broad as possible, he does describe the key aspects of *modernismo* in an 1890 vignette of Ricardo Palma. This schema would serve as the touch point for artists moving forward. Darío's modernism refuses didacticism and locates beauty as the highest goal:

[E]levation and factual accuracy in criticism, in prose, freedom, imagination and the triumph of the beautiful over the didactic; originality in poetry and the infusion of colour, life, air and flexibility to old verse forms which suffered from repression for they were pressed between imitated iron moulds.¹

(qtd. in Franco 1994: 119)

By the time Darío wrote this text, modernismo was already a dynamic movement that included writers from all over Latin America. The rupture of traditional poetic form, breaking it free from the iron molds of the past, would provide the space for a poetry in which the young blood of this corps of authors could breathe new life into antiquated forms and break new ground.

The publication of Darío's collection of stories and poems, *Azul* (*Blue*, 1888), marks the official beginning of modernismo while the emergence of a cadre of literary magazines in the 1890s signalled an improved cultural position for arts and literature. Darío and Bolivian writer Ricardo Jaimes Freyre founded the *Revista de América* (*Magazine of America*) in Buenos Aires, while *Cosmópolis* (Venezuela), *Revista Moderna* (*Modern Magazine*, Mexico) and *Pluma y lápiz* (*Pen and Pencil*, Chile) gained readership across the continent (Franco 1994: 120). The participation in these magazines from modernista writers, as well as their work as journalists and essayists, solidified the growing collective of authors that was coalescing around two centres, one in Buenos Aires and the other in Mexico City.

In Mexico, modernismo took form around the literary magazine *Revista Azul* (*Blue Magazine*). The name of the magazine resonates with Darío's inaugural poetry collection. The symbolism of the colour blue takes its root in Victor Hugo's 'l'art c'est l'azur', conjuring images of the ideal, the infinite, and the heavens, affinities of the modernistas (Valera 1888: v). Founded by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and edited by Luis G. Urbina, the magazine ran for just three years, 1894–6. In those years, it circulated texts from Latin America, Spain, Germany, and England, bringing together many of the era's major figures and containing pieces by many of the early modernistas including Darío and José Martí (1853–95), a Cuban revolutionary, poet, and author.

A frequent contributor to *Revista Azul*, Martí travelled extensively and wrote dispatches of his travels that formed the basis for his vision for a Latin American culture in his journalistic work, essays, and poems. On the front lines of Cuba's war for independence, Martí, by the age of 16, had already been sentenced to six years of hard labour for his writings and affiliations with revolutionaries (González Echevarría 2012: 27). After serving a year, he was exiled to Spain and spent much of the rest of his life travelling between New York, Central America, and Cuba where he died in battle against the Spanish forces.² In his short life, he wrote some of the most influential pieces in Latin American poetry, and left an immense body of correspondence for *La nación* in Buenos Aires. 'Nuestra América' ('Our America', 1891) is perhaps the best known of his essays, and is a call for the Latin American people to rise up and forge a new history that throws off the politics, racial hierarchies, and histories of their European conquerors in favour of a history that takes pride in their pre-European legacies and defines Latin America on its own terms, while at the same time rejecting the influence of the United States. The essay is a cornerstone of Latin American political and aesthetic thought.

Martí's presence in *Revista Azul* was significant in crystallizing modernismo in Latin America. For many authors, *Revista Azul* was a revolutionary and landmark publication. Therefore, when Manuel Caballero proposed to revive the magazine as an *anti-modernista* publication in 1907, it sparked a fierce debate in literary circles. Caballero denounced the decadence of modernistas as sickness and called for an art that was 'limpio, sano y fuerte' ('clean, healthy and strong') (García Morales 1992: 58). Caballero's denunciation of decadence was motivated by a resistance to French

influence (associated with the colonialist past) and the need for a future-oriented aesthetic. Caballero's objections were representative of the polyphonic modernisms in Latin America, all striving to define a modern voice for Latin American literature.

The relaunch was not successful due to the protestations of authors who held the original publication in high esteem and saw themselves as the rightful inheritors of Gutiérrez Nájera's movement. This group included Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, and Antonio Caso who were affiliated with the *Revista Moderna*, which ran from 1898–1903 and in its second incarnation from 1903–11 (García Morales 1992: 58). Like Gutiérrez Nájera, they too were well connected to European currents of philosophy and art and were more cosmopolitan than their contemporaries at Caballero's *Revista Azul*. This group would form the basis of the Ateneo de Juventud.

The Ateneo de la Juventud – or the Atheneum of the Youth, a group of young intellectuals led by Alfonso Reyes and José Vasconcelos – shares with modernismo a return to a humanist tradition as a reprieve from the extreme positivism of the era, particularly in relation to Porfirio Díaz's regime in Mexico. Yet, the Ateneistas are more in touch with Mexico's politics. For the Ateneistas, the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) aroused a unified concern for reform and therefore an abandonment of the art for art's sake ethos found in the modernista movement. Vasconcelos was a leading figure in education reform in Mexico where he drew on the help of other authors such as Chilean Gabriela Mistral to build new national reform programmes. Mistral would go on to become the first Latin American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945 for her visionary work that combined the concepts of wholeness and unity in art with ideas of motherhood, vitality, and prayer.

In response to the positivist discourse that arose in Mexico in reaction to the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, Enrique González Martínez, one of the founding members of the Ateneo, penned his best remembered poem, 'Tuércele el cuello al cisne' ('Twist the Neck of the Swan', 1911). Darío had chosen the swan as the symbol of his poetry and to twist the neck of the swan with its 'deceitful plumage' is to cast off the ostentatious metaphors of modernismo in favour of his own symbol, the owl of wisdom for the new lyric poetry (Pastén and Agustín 1997: 3). While the Ateneistas tended to be more leftist in their politics in contrast to the more conservative position of the modernista elite, they shared the same concern for the centrality of humanism in devising a new poetry that reflected the tenor of Latin America.

In post-revolutionary Mexico, a new vanguard movement, the Contemporáneos, inherited their intellectual position from Vasconcelos and the Ateneistas with a focus on education and raising Mexico's prominence on an international scale. They emerged in the late 1920s as a 'group without a group', a loose association of writers and artists with a similar concern for creating a cosmopolitan vision for Mexican letters (Gordon 1989: 1096). In contrast to other young avant-gardes, as Henrique González Casanova described them, they belonged to the upper middle class, the group most affected by the Revolution, creating the desire to form an aristocracy of thought and expression. They were a precocious generation, bitter, earnest, and willing to challenge authority (Sheridan 1985: 15). In a tumultuous political era, these young artists were eager to engage with the changing political landscape. At the same time, this more cosmopolitan ideal carried with it an urban intellectual elite perspective.

In this perspective, they contrast with a number of other vanguard groups, including the more radical Estridentistas, a group whose hyper-masculinist rhetoric and manifestoes are akin to Marinetti's futurists or Lewis' vorticists. Among the key principles of Manuel Maples Arce's 1923 'Manifiesto Estridentista' are to exalt machines, to live emotionally, and to put oneself in step with the future (Maples Arce 1923). This cutting manifesto also calls on Estridentistas to tear down popular idols, and the concluding section states that 'to be an Estridentista is to be a man. Only eunuchs will not be with us.'³ More radical and more experimental in their work than the Contemporáneos, the Estridentistas are also more aligned with the creation of a new Mexican nationalism. Like futurism, nationalism becomes tied to a reassertion of hyper-masculinity in politics and art, and in a vision for the future.

While the Revolution marked a turning-point in Mexico's modernismo, in Argentina the literati were taking modernismo in alternate directions. Among the largest cities in the world with a diverse cosmopolitan population, Buenos Aires had quickly become a hub of modernista activity, replacing Spain and even France as the centre of the Latin American literary world. Darío took up residence there in 1890 and was surrounded by what would come to be known as the Generation of 1900. The group included his protégé, Uruguayan Delmira Agustini, one of the few female poets of the movement, who was known for her erotic imagery and representations of female sexuality; Argentine Leopoldo Lugones, whose book of poetry *Los crepúsculos del jardín* (*The Twilight of the Garden*, 1905) is a landmark modernista text, and whose later literary experiments in cosmology and theosophy are foundational in the genre of the fantastic; and Uruguayan Julio Herrera y Reissig, who pushed the boundaries of modernism further than his predecessors, using multiple metaphors and mixing elements of the subconscious with the occult. Herrera y Reissig opened the space for more radical avant-garde movements anticipating dada and surrealism (González Echevarría 2012: 55–7). The Generation of 1900 set the foundation not just for modernismo, but also for other forms of Latin American modernism and their many heirs. Even for those groups who did not share modernismo's idealist, anti-positivist articulation of a Latin American literary identity, Darío's group offered a vocabulary and a position from which to argue an alternative way to 'make it new'.

Argentina produced a number of the era's most prominent prose writers as well. Jorge Luis Borges returned to Buenos Aires in 1921 and had his hand in editing a number of magazines including *Nosotros* [Us], *Prisma*, and *Proa*, the last of which he edited alongside the older experimental writer Macedonio Fernández. *Proa* claimed to be the first purely literary magazine in the nation. For Borges and his contemporaries, the old models of modernismo had begun to fall away and the new vanguard took their place in publications such as *Martín Fierro*, a magazine named for the epic nationalist poem of the same name that heralds the rural gaucho as the basis for Argentine identity. In the magazine's 1924 manifesto, Oliverio Girondo called for young artists to cast off the old affinities for anachronisms and mimeticism in favour of new artistic sensibility that captures the ear and the eye of the Argentine and the Latin American (Girondo 1924).

To stay in contact with the latest developments in modernism and the avant-garde worldwide, many Latin American authors travelled extensively, particularly to Europe. This endeavour was not simply to bring European works back to Latin

America, but also to introduce the world to Latin America. Peruvian Ventura García Calderón moved to Paris and founded *La Revista de América* in 1912, which he said 'belonged to the intellectual elite across the sea' (qtd. in Hale 1989: 276). The magazine ran until 1914 and included authors from all over Latin America. García Calderón emphasized the Latin connection between France and Latin America to identify a shared intellectual history apart from Spain.

Also working out of Paris was Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro. Coming of age as a writer among the modernistas and serving briefly as an editor for *Revista Azul* in 1913, Huidobro moved to Europe and travelled in elite literary spheres in a Paris that included Gertrude Stein, Guillermo Apollinaire, and Pablo Picasso. There he was a founding member of the creacionismo movement that claimed that the poet was a small god, a creator in his own right without the need to imitate nature (Franco 1994: 161). In Madrid, he helped to found the ultraísta movement, another avant-garde venture with clear ties to imagism in their search for reducing poetry to metaphor, paring down the flowery language, ornamentation, and decadence of modernismo. The movement was active between 1918 and 1922 with the magazine *Ultra*, and largely disbanded with the close of the magazine, with the exception of Jorge Luis Borges who would later return to Buenos Aires and develop this movement in Argentina through the magazines *Nosotros* and later *Sur*. In the 1920s Huidobro was also a frequent contributor to Eugene Jolas' magazine *transition*, a transnational, experimental journal that connected a number of avant-garde movements across borders.

This same transnational element was in operation in Brazil where authors adapted modernist approaches into a distinctly Brazilian form. Representative of this nationalist form is Mário de Andrade whose book of poetry, *Paulicéia Desvairada* (*Hallucinated City*, 1922) was dedicated to the city of Sao Paulo and included regional colloquialisms in its formal experiments in free verse. In 1922 Andrade formed the Grupo dos Cinco along with like-minded artists Anita Malfetti and Tarsila do Amaral, and poets Oswald de Andrade (no relation) and Menotti del Picchia. Together they hosted the Week of Modern Art in 1922, performing, reading poetry, and hosting lectures. They brought the European art scene to Sao Paulo while introducing their own work to the growing artistic circle in Brazil. The event became the touchstone for Brazilian modernism (Sollars 2008: 26).

The inclusion of local language and indigenous histories is a thread that appears in several Latin American modernisms in the 1920s, and reflects a different vision for literature than the modernista predecessors. Authors such as García Calderón and José Enrique Rodó envisioned a new future for Latin America based on the cultural elite and largely ignored the rural and the indigenous populations in their assessments of Latin American culture. In 1900, Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó addressed the young urban elite in his essay 'Ariel'. Rodó describes Latin American artists as Ariel from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the play, Ariel is a marker for the spirit and the arts, diaphanous and light. He is set in opposition to Caliban, a representation of all the basest concerns of nature. Rodó takes the figure of Ariel as a rallying cry for Latin American youth to reject the utilitarianism of the United States that reduces the individual to a replaceable part in the industrial machine, and instead embrace a modernity that uses Athens as its model and values the unique composition and erudition of South America as its core.

By the 1920s, with a stronger incursion of the United States in Latin American politics, this configuration began to change. In 1925, Vasconcelos wrote ‘La raza cósmica’ (‘The Cosmic Race’), an essay that articulates his ideas of a Latin American identity in opposition to the discourses of progress and evolution proffered by Anglo-Saxon rhetoric, particularly as it came from the United States.

If we are, then, geologically ancient, as well as in respect to tradition, how can we still continue to accept this fiction invented by our European fathers, of the novelty of a continent that existed since before the appearance of the land from where they produced discoverers and reconquerors?⁴

(Vasconcelos 1979 [1925]: 8)

The imperial narrative of a single, linear trajectory of progress that sees white Anglo-Saxon men as the endpoint of civilization does not hold up to any logical view of history, particularly on the continent that had seen the rise of advanced civilizations long before the arrival of Europeans. Vasconcelos’ text aims to reverse this narrative to envision a future that is led by a more universal culture, a race more reflective of that in Latin America where races and cultures had mixed to form new kinds of peoples. In contrast to the United States’ policies of segregation and racial purity, the mixed, universal race could advance civilization, adding a creative and unique perspective, whereas the ‘purified’ white race would decay. The embracing of the diverse cultural and racial history of Latin America as literary and cultural power would continue throughout the twentieth century and include the *negrismo* and *négritude* movements in the Caribbean inspired by the Harlem Renaissance and fuelled by Martinican thinkers Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire.

The emphasis on Latin America’s hybrid culture, straddling Europe and the Andes, a modern mechanized society alongside an indigenous past, marks Latin American modernisms with their own distinctive qualities. The disjoint in time that writer Carlos Fuentes would later pessimistically call the ‘black angel of lost time’ that hovers over Latin America opens space for the simultaneous discussion of alternate epistemologies alongside of contemporary notions of science, modernity, and progress (Franco 2002: 139). In the wake of modernismo, Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier would reconceptualize this juxtaposition unique to Latin America as the ‘real maravilloso’ (marvelous real) in the prologue to his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*). Carpentier sees this dual history as particularly active in Haiti, the setting for the novel. The Haitian Revolution creates the space for a violent clash between the Afro-Caribbean history of the enslaved peoples and the European and Creole traditions of the landowners. The marvelous real allows for both of these histories to exist side by side in an extension of the genre of the fantastic that denies the reader the ability to discern reality from the supernatural. In the marvelous real, both reality and the supernatural are reality. Though earlier writers such as Leopoldo Lugones pioneered this genre, magical realism became the hallmark of Latin American novels in the 1960s and 1970s.

Carpentier’s generation also produced one of the most decorated and prestigious Latin American authors, Pablo Neruda. Neruda, born Neftalí Reyes in Chile, found success early. His 1924 volume of poems *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*) was one of the most

circulated books of poetry in Latin America, and garnered enough attention to secure him a diplomatic post as a consul to Burma (González Echevarría 2012: 70). His poetry, while drawing on contemporary movements, largely stands on its own; at times autobiographical, at others using a repetitious melodic form, and often focusing on themes of isolation and a desire for wholeness and unity (Franco 1994: 281–3). These threads culminate in his later work *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* (*The Heights of Macchu Picchu*), part of his sweeping epic *Canto General* (*General Song*). Neruda won the Nobel Prize in 1971 and died two years later.

As a chronicler of modernity, fellow Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz understood the sometimes paradoxical dualities of Latin American literature. He saw the history of Latin American modernity and modern literature as an evanescent reality with sparks of creativity scattered throughout (Paz 1997: 15). Despite the distinct approaches and formal decisions each of these modern movements spawned at the end of the nineteenth century, they all offered critiques of the modernizing world. Yet, determined, at least in part, by their geographical location and economic position, these groups' individual responses to the crisis of modernity reflect the difficulty in characterizing an entire continent's literary production. No one response to modernity or singular vision of the artist can be applied to the whole. Together, however, their efforts to stem the tide of universalizing rationalization that threatened to swallow up Latin American culture in favour of Americanization helped to make room for the next generation of writers. They too would live through revolutions, dictators, economic exploitation, and upheaval, but they would be able to take with them the uniquely Latin American foundational structures and modes of expression the Generation of 1900 had forged.

NOTES

1. '[L]a elevación y la demostración en la crítica, [...] la libertad y el vuelo, y el triunfo de lo bello sobre lo preceptivo, en la prosa; y la novedad en la poesía: dar color y vida y aire y flexibilidad al antiguo verso, que sufría anquilosis, apretado entre tomados moldes de hierro' (Franco 1994: 119).
2. For a longer discussion of Martí's revolutionary actions in Cuba, see Anderson's *Under Three Flags*.
3. 'Ser estridentista es ser hombre. Sólo los eunucos no estarán con nosotros' (Maples Arce 1923).
4. 'Si, pues, somos antiguos geológicamente y también en lo que respecta a la tradición, ¿cómo podremos seguir aceptando esta ficción inventada por nuestros padres europeos, de la novedad de un continente que existía desde antes de que apareciese la tierra de donde procedían descubridores y reconquistadores?' (Vasconcelos 1979: 6).

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

RENOVATION, RUPTURE, AND RESTORATION

The modernist musical experience in Latin America



Alejandro L. Madrid

Musical modernism in Latin America is difficult to define. There have been a great variety of aesthetic projects throughout Latin America from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century that one could easily understand as responding to a modernist spirit. The music of composers as stylistically different as the Argentine Alberto Williams and the Cuban Leo Brouwer responds to similar modernist concerns, charting fundamental continuities that even divergent aesthetic, geographic, and temporal contexts cannot wholly obscure. Taking its impetus from these continuities, this chapter provides a narrative based on stylistic and aesthetic tendencies that cross national boundaries, instead of focusing on national affiliations or styles. By attending to the presence of women, from Carmen Barradas – who stopped composing in the 1930s, discouraged by her male colleagues' lack of interest in her work – to female composers throughout Latin America at the end of the twentieth century (Adina Izarra, Hilda Paredes, Ana Lara, Diana Arsimendi, Gabriela Ortiz), musical modernism also offers a glimpse into one of modernization's central features: women's advancement into mainstream Western social and cultural life.

To find the common aesthetic and philosophical questions informing the musical activities of the many composers, musicians, and musical movements one could label as modernist, it is necessary to determine the basic ideas shared by modernist artists from the end of the nineteenth through the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Modernismo*, the cosmopolitan literary movement many consider the first true independent Latin American artistic movement, provides a good point of departure. Disillusioned with the traditional literary styles and forms favoured by Spanish and Latin American writers in the nineteenth century, modernista poets proposed to renovate language by appropriating and transforming ideas from French symbolism and Parnassianism according to specific Latin American experiences, to give rise to aesthetic questions beyond both domestic and European traditions. Thus, the modernistas proposed to invigorate the Spanish language through cross-fertilization (Madrid 2008: 88–9). Sometimes taking the reformist path of modernists who sought to expand tradition, sometimes more radically breaking away from tradition, this cosmopolitan desire lies at the core of modernist and avant-garde experiences in Europe and the United States as well as Latin America.

However, it would be unreasonable to measure innovation within specific, geographically and temporally located music and artistic scenes according to criteria perceived as ‘universal’. Artists and musicians developed specific modernist aesthetics and styles as responses to what they experienced as fossilized languages within their own artistic traditions. Thus, modernist styles among music scenes where concepts like ‘absolute music’ or ‘organicism’ were the norm could not develop in the same way as in scenes where salon music was the lingua franca. This observation is essential in understanding a series of Latin American musical practices as modernist expressions, regardless of how they would be considered in Europe.

The modernista spirit shared its moment with modern nation-building projects. The Argentine expansion to Indigenous territory and the process of industrialization of the 1880s; the Peruvian period of national reconstruction and of the so-called Aristocratic Republic in the 1880s; the Brazilian establishment of the early republic in the 1890s; the Cuban independence of 1899; and the Mexican failure to build a liberal nation leading to the 1910 revolution combined to generate the need for new aesthetic icons of both nationality and modernity.

Although there were no musicians among the artists who developed the modernista movement, there were composers throughout Latin America who embraced the modernistas’ desire for the renovation of expressive tools and their cosmopolitan aspirations. Many Latin American modernist composers suggested overhauling the expressive languages dominating their countries’ conservative music scenes – European styles like salon music (waltz, mazurka, polka) and Italian opera – by incorporating elements from local folk or urban traditions. Such a move addressed the modernist desire for renovation and the nationalist political needs for a unique sense of locality.

Early Latin American musical modernisms are frequently connected to issues of identity expressed through nationalist sentiment and rhetoric. Thus, the nativist incorporation of Argentine folk musical elements into European idioms in the works of Alberto Williams, or the amalgamation of Brazilian urban popular rhythms (choro, maxixe, lundu, etc.) with polkas and waltzes in the piano music of Ernesto Nazareth and later in the music of Heitor Villa-Lobos, provide musical counterparts to the modernista spirit and reflections upon – and responses to – experiences of modernization in Argentina and Brazil at the turn of the twentieth century. Manuel M. Ponce’s 1913 nationalist call to take traditional folk Mexican music as the basis of a national musical style (Madrid 2008: 90), and the later Afrocubanista modernist work of Alejandro García Caturla and Amadeo Roldán, which reevaluated the ambivalent role of African heritage in constructing a Cuban identity (Moore 1997: 220–1), extend this modernist/nationalist spirit out of two specific political moments: the Mexican revolution and the machadato in Cuba. These articulations of local musical traditions may also appear as appropriations of the Orientalist desire that informed the work of European modernist composers such as Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, or Darius Milhaud. However, while European modernists engaged the non-Western Other, Latin American composers often referred to the Other within their own discourses of ethnic representation. These composers invigorated and renewed their inherited European musical languages through the self-exoticizing recourse to Indigenous or Afro-Latin American musics. Some of the works best exemplifying this tendency include Williams’s *Cantares*, Op. 70 (1899); the zarzuela

El condor pasa... (1913) by Peruvian composer Daniel Alomía Robles;[†] the opera *Quiché Vinak* (1924) by Guatemalan composer/ethnomusicologist Jesús Castillo; Roldán's percussion piece *Rítmica V* (1930); and García Caturla's puppet opera *Manita en el suelo* (1931).

MAVERICKS, EARLY AVANT-GARDES, AND -ISMS

In the 1920s, composers throughout the West developed more radical approaches to musical modernism. Functional tonality was one of the first elements of their musical traditions that they wanted to replace. Thus, atonality was a consequence of the ultra-chromaticism that characterized late nineteenth-century music. Coming from a musical tradition that explained music history as a form of teleology, composers were obsessed with discovering and codifying the musical languages of the future that would replace tonality; Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone technique, Edgard Varèse's incorporation of noises along the lines of Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1913), and Alois Haba's microtonal music were among the diverse modernist languages emerging from these preoccupations. Many Latin American composers were also concerned with these issues; some forged their own paths, relatively autonomous from foreign trends, while others found inspiration in the European avant-garde and the numerous musical-isms they generated.

Some of the most remarkable Latin American modernist musical creations came from composers who did not follow European musical tendencies. Julián Carrillo from Mexico and Carmen Barradas from Uruguay both worked largely in isolation and represent an important break from traditional Western notions of tonality. Carrillo developed a microtonal system labelled 'Sonido 13' ('The Thirteenth Sound') based on equal subdivisions of the half tone (up to 1/16 of a tone). Unlike European microtonal composers of the time, Carrillo's system was not developed out of a desire to account for microtonal folk scales; instead, it was the result of the composer's interest in non-tonal scales, and validated a teleological take on the incorporation of partials from the overtone series into harmonies (Madrid 2008: 25). *Preludio a Colón* (1924) – a piece based on 1/4-, 1/8-, and 1/16ths of a tone for which Carrillo had to design special instruments – is one of his most famous compositions. Barradas developed a musical style based on free atonality, polytonality, and use of clusters, and created a graphic notation to overcome the expressive limitations of traditional notation (Santos Melgarejo 2012). Her *Fabricación* (1922), a solo piano work that attempts to reproduce the sound of a factory, predates works of similar futurist character by Arthur Honegger, John Alden Carpenter, and Alexander Mosolov.

In 1922, Mario de Andrade, a writer and musicologist who had a strong influence on the trajectory of musical modernism in Brazil, helped organize the Week of Modernism in São Paulo, an influential arts festival that set the tone for the two modernist tendencies that dominated Brazilian art scenes in the following decades: Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia* (based on the appropriation of foreign influences) and Plínio Salgado's fascist nationalism (preaching a Brazilian art devoid of foreign influences). De Andrade's vision for music of the future, explained in his *Pequena história da música* (1929), suggested incorporating folk and popular musical elements into the modernist challenge of traditional forms (Luper 1965: 44–5). These ideas resonated with earlier compositional practices by Villa-Lobos and worked as a

modernist manifesto for younger composers like Oscar Lorenzo Fernández and Francisco Mignone. Villa-Lobos's *Danças características africanas* for solo piano (1922), Fernández's orchestral suite *Reisado do pastoreio* (1930), and Mignone's ballet *Maracatu de chico rei* (1939) are good examples of these modernist tendencies.

A wide variety of Latin American composers during the 1920s and 1930s shared the cosmopolitan spirit of modernism, coupling a break from functional tonality – through atonality as well as polytonality – with the desire to incorporate local folk and popular music elements into new musical languages. Many engaged these issues by seizing the two most dominant compositional approaches of the first half of the twentieth century: Schoenberg's 12-tone technique and Igor Stravinsky's neoclassicism. Most Latin American composers, free from the dogmatic constraints that prevented many European composers from intermingling the two, cavalierly borrowed from the two styles according to their own expressive needs. The Mexican and Argentine scenes – especially the activities of Grupo Renovación – illustrate the stylistic heterogeneity within specific Latin American compositional communities. In Mexico, the 1910 revolution profoundly transformed the artistic scene, as demonstrated by the 1926 National Congress of Music, the old guard's attempt to control and guide those changes, and the birth of *estridentismo*, the country's first avant-garde movement.

Carlos Chávez and Silvestre Revueltas originally embraced the estridentistas' radical avant-garde agenda, epitomized in their motto 'Chopin to the Electric Chair', but soon developed eclectic styles borrowing from neoclassicism as well as folk and popular local traditions. This heterogeneity manifests in their futurist-influenced pieces, like Chávez's *Energía* (1925) or Revueltas's *Esquinas* (1930), the first an abstract musical representation of a factory (Madrid 2008: 73), the second a piece incorporating the sounds of Mexico City's streets (Kolb Neuhaus 2012: 105–7). Other examples include neoclassical works such as Revueltas' four string quartets (1930–2) or Chávez's six symphonies (1933–61), as well as Chávez's *Invención* (1958) in which the composer avoids repetition and Revueltas's *Sensemayá* (1936), a repetitive, almost primitivist work inspired by a poem by the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.

The same proclivity for heterogeneity appears among Argentine composers active with the Grupo Renovación, founded in 1929 as a reaction against early nationalist movements (Veniard 1986: 94). The group included composers interested in neoclassical techniques and Argentine folk and popular elements, as in Symphony No. 3 'Argentina' (1934) by Juan José Castro; Luis Gianneo's string quartets Nos. 1 and 3 (1936 and 1952) (Veniard 1986: 100–101, 104); Juan Carlos Paz's Octet (1930); and 12-tone techniques, as in Paz's *Passacaglia* (1936) (Corrado 2010: 126).

Neoclassically-inspired aesthetics, often spiced by local folk-music, dominated Latin American art music through the 1950s, including Guatemalan Ricardo Castillo's *Sinfonietta* (1945); Ecuadorian Luis Humberto Salgado's Symphony No. 3 (1955); Brazilian Mozart Camargo Guarnieri's Choro for piano and orchestra (1956); Venezuelan Antonio Estéves' *Mediodía en el llano* for orchestra (1942); Chilean Juan Orrego Salas' Piano Concerto No. 1 (1950); Uruguayan Héctor Tosar's Toccata for orchestra (1944); Cuban Julián Orbón's *Tres versiones sinfónicas* (1954); and Peruvian Celso Garrido-Lecca's *Elegía a Machu Pichu* for orchestra (1964).

Early in his career, Argentine Alberto Ginastera embraced a neoclassical style infused with local musical elements similar to that of the composers discussed above;

later, he moved away from this nationalist neoclassicism to embrace serialism and even the type of controlled aleatorism privileged by European and American composers of the 1960s. Late in life, Ginastera developed a musical language integrating his interest in Argentine folk music, serialism, and aleatoric techniques, including his *Sonata for Guitar*, Op. 47 (1976) (Basinski 1994).

Other composers from this generation were also interested in 12-tone music, but few embraced it as energetically as the Panamanian Roque Cordero and the Mexican Jorge González Avila, who dedicated most of their lives to composing 12-tone and serial music. For many, including Luis Humberto Salgado and the Brazilians Luiz Cosme and Edino Krieger, experimenting with the 12-tone method was a way to free themselves from the constraints of functional tonality; however, their interest in it quickly faded. For others, 12-tone music and serialism worked as the common ground between the neoclassical generation and the younger avant-garde composers who became active in the 1960s, as in the case of Cuba's Grupo de Renovación Musical, founded as a neoclassical musical endeavour by the Spaniard-Cuban José Ardevol in 1942. Many group members also experimented with serialism, open aleatoric forms, and electroacoustic music. Puerto Rican Héctor Campos Parsi engaged neoclassicism, serialism, aleatorism, and electroacoustic music throughout his life. These composers' aesthetic concerns bridge the modernist generation's desire for renovation and the radical shift away from such an idea in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s avant-garde composers.

THE AVANT-GARDE

Musical modernism in the 1950s experienced a shift of meaning, from the reformist expansion and renovation of language that had characterized it since the beginning of the twentieth century into a radical tradition of discontinuity and continuous experimentalism that 'implies the negation not only of tradition but of discontinuity as well' (Paz 1974: 1). This new phase of modernism makes 'widespread use of subversive or openly disruptive artistic techniques' and rejects existing institutions (Calinescu 1987: 95).

Although many young Latin American avant-garde composers were interested in the methodological rigour of serialism, they gravitated towards aleatoric practices and indeterminacy. Inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, and John Cage, young Latin American composers delved into open forms and new graphic notations that implied higher degrees of collaboration with performers and audiences alike. They felt these trends allowed them more creative freedom. In some cases these tendencies were radical challenges to the ontological boundaries of the work of art as well as to authorship. The vibrant experimental avant-garde scenes from Buenos Aires, Havana, Mexico City, and São Paulo-Bahia became referents for young composers throughout Latin America and beyond.

The music branch of the Di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires, the Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM), was created with support from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1962 at the height of the Cold War, under the direction of Alberto Ginastera. Its centre offered instruction by prominent international avant-garde composers – Luigi Dallapiccola, Bruno Maderna, Olivier Messiaen, Luigi Nono, Xenakis, etc. – and one of the first electronic music laboratories

in the region. It became an immediate magnet for talent from throughout South America: composers linked with it include Argentines Alcides Lanza, Gerardo Gandini, and Mario Davidovsky; Brazilians Marlos Nobre and Jorge Antunes; Colombian Jacqueline Nova; Peruvian Edgar Valcárcel; and Uruguayans Coriún Aharonián and Graciela Paraskevaídis. Most were progressive leftists whose radical music came to be considered a challenge to bourgeois lifestyles. Politically conservative factions accused the centre of propagating communism, giving Juan Carlos Onganía's military dictatorship an excuse to censor its activities (Herrera 2012: 28–9). Most of the fellows at the CLAEM became leading figures after the centre closed in 1971.

In São Paulo and Bahia, Brazil, *Musica Nova* and *Grupo Bahia* challenged the previous generations' nationalist-modernist music. They emphasized individual expression over the homogenizing compositional styles and techniques that had become the compositional norm. Composers associated with these two groups include Gilberto Mendes, Ernst Widmer, Rogério Duprat, Jamarly Oliveira, Lindembergue Cardoso, and even the celebrated tropicalista songwriter Tom Zé. Their eclectic multidisciplinary artistic influences include everything from Rob Rauschenberg and Cage to Henri Pousseur and Franz Kafka. One feature that characterized them was their attempt to break the barriers between highbrow and lowbrow musics; the central role of Duprat and Zé in the trajectory of *tropicália*, one of Brazil's most notable avant-garde popular music movements, is a consequence of their involvements with these groups. The insolence of *Motet em ré menor – Beba Coca-Cola* (1966) by Mendes is an icon of the type of work produced within these scenes.

The triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959 and its turn towards socialism in 1961 increased support for modernist and avant-garde music that differed radically from the treatment of music in the USSR. While the avant-garde was considered a formal expression of bourgeois decadence in post-1930s USSR, in Cuba it was understood as expressing the rebel spirit that had triggered the revolution. During the revolution's early years, the government sponsored many young composers' educations and expanded their artistic horizons abroad. Particularly important was Leo Brouwer's participation at the 1961 Warsaw Autumn Festival, where he was introduced to the avant-garde works of Krzysztof Penderecki and Stockhausen. This event catalyzed an avant-garde Cuban scene that emphasized creative freedom, music's role in shaping a revolutionary society, and engaging with a non-prejudiced audience. The use of musical quotations and collages to create dissonant textures in Brouwer's *La tradición se rompe...pero cuesta trabajo* (1967), the controlled aleatorism, clusters, and innovative uses of theatrical space in *Relieves* (1969) by Carlos Fariñas, and the incorporation of pre-recorded elements into a type of musical happening in *Contrapunto espacial No. 3* (1969) by Juan Blanco (Brouwer 1986: 35–6) exemplify a musical and aesthetic freedom that reflected the utopian and radical promise of the revolution.

In 1956, painter José Luis Cuevas published 'La cortina del nopal' ('The Prickly Pear Curtain'), a harsh critique of Mexican nationalism and a call for artists to engage with the international art scene that quickly became the manifesto of the Mexican avant-garde. Composers Manuel Enríquez, Alicia Urreta, Mario Lavista, and Julio Estrada represent four distinct ways of taking up these ideas. In the 1960s, Enríquez was one of the first Mexican composers to incorporate graphic notation in his scores. Works as diverse as *Cuarteto II* (1967) or *Canto a un dios mineral* (1992) show his use of different degrees of chance (Alonso Minutti and Portillo 2013: 38–42). Urreta's

Salmodia I (1971) combines elements of temporal and melodic indeterminacy with a more controlled harmonic practice (Vilar Payá 2000). Lavista's early compositions embraced a variety of avant-garde techniques, from chance and serialism to de-contextualized musical quotations. But Lavista's work with Quanta, an improvisation group that presented concerts on Mexico City's streets, truly marked his avant-garde period. *Jaula* (1976) for prepared piano, a piece of conceptual art/music created in collaboration with painter Arnaldo Coen to celebrate Cage's 64th birthday, best exemplifies this phase (Alonso Minutti, forthcoming). Initially influenced by ideas about indeterminacy, Estrada developed a style based on exploring the continuum of rhythm and sound by synthesizing pitch and gesture, exemplified in his opera *Pedro Páramo* (Fürst-Heidtmann 2001: 347).

Other Latin American composers worth mentioning are Argentines Mauricio Kagel, Alicia Terzian – who incorporates tape, dance, improvisation, and audience participation in *Musidanza visión* (1972) – and Elsa Justel, an advocate of electroacoustic music; Peruvians Aurelio Tello and Pedro Seiji Asato, whose aleatoric pieces reveal the remarkable avant-garde scene in 1970s Lima (Tello 1986: 71, 76); and Puerto Rico-based Francis Schwartz, whose multi-sensorial musical theatre *Auschwitz* (1968) shocked audiences at its premiere.

MODERNISM AFTER THE AVANT-GARDE

The radicalism of an avant-garde that emphasized the destruction of languages over their creation sharply disconnected composers from their audiences. In the 1990s, many Latin American composers moved away from this tendency in efforts to develop musical languages that, even when dissonant, allowed for the possibility of sharing musical codes with their audiences. Lavista developed a modernist musical language based on renaissance and medieval techniques and structures, and explored extended techniques in traditional instruments, as in *Reflejos de la noche* (1984), a classic of Latin American modernism (Alonso Minutti, forthcoming). Pieces like *Tríptico* (1989) by Puerto Rican Roberto Sierra and *Altar de neón* (1995) by Mexican Gabriela Ortiz combine complex rhythmic patterns inspired by popular music within a synthetic yet rigorous musical language that comments on the seeming contradictions between cosmopolitanism and local hybridity among Latin American artists. Brazilian Arthur Kampela developed a personal language that reads popular and traditional Brazilian music styles, genres, and techniques through the aesthetics of New Complexity and Elliott Carter's notion of metric modulation, including his series of Percussion Studies for solo guitar. Using the term 'sonic textures' to describe his compositions, Chilean Pablo Aranda avoids traditional notions of form, melody, and motivic development. *Dí* (1995) exemplifies a delicate language of resonances based on the sonic and timbric combination of instruments so that their individuality melts into a larger super-instrument (Díaz and González 2011: 59–60).

The historical trajectories of Latin American modernist and avant-garde musics have developed in a continuous dialogue with international musical tendencies and aesthetics. However, these practices have also acquired meaning through complex local networks of political, cultural, social, and economic relations. As such, Latin American modernisms provide unique spaces to explore the kinds of transcultural processes that inform local articulations of cosmopolitan ideas in post-colonial contexts.

NOTE

1. The *plegaria* from this zarzuela was covered and recorded as ‘If I Could’ by Simon and Garfunkel in their LP *Bridge over Troubled Waters* (1970).

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CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

MODERNISM'S UNFINISHED STAGE Theatre in Latin America



Sarah J. Townsend

This chapter offers a speculative survey of a field that does not (yet) exist. Despite the perennial debates surrounding Latin American modernism and increasing interest in the region's theatrical traditions, the phrase 'modernist theatre in Latin America' is apt to puzzle specialists in all relevant areas of study. Part of the problem concerns the ambiguous contours of Latin America: does it include the Caribbean and countries where the official language is English, French, or Dutch? Theatre is also notoriously difficult to define, and then there are the multiple slippages and asynchronicities in the meaning of modernism across linguistic boundaries as well as discrepancies among the disciplines with which theatre and performance overlap. Recent criticism has thrown another wrench in the works with the notion of 'comparative' or 'global modernisms'; yet even when viewed through this wider lens, the object of inquiry remains obscure. Few writers in Latin America who are classified as modernist penned plays, even fewer saw their works staged, and despite some notable exceptions, the scattered attempts to create a 'modernist' (or 'avant-garde') theatre generally failed to get off the ground.

There is a long and venerable tradition of portraying this situation as a sign of lack, an unsettling symptom of historical backwardness and developmental delay. While acknowledging the grain of truth in such interpretations, I suggest that this apparent shortcoming can also critically expose some of the problems (and possibilities) that theatre poses for the category of modernism as a whole. In Europe and the United States, too, theatre has borne the burden of backwardness ever since the more 'modern' medium of cinema arrived on the scene, and the very idea of modernist theatre is dogged by the anxiety of obsolescence. Perhaps this is one reason for the anti-theatrical impulse common to so many modernist works. Several recent critics have recast this resistance to theatricality as a generative force, in part by establishing the importance of modernist closet dramas (plays written to be read rather than performed) – a move which should prompt Latin Americanists to re-examine dramatic texts dismissed as excessively 'literary' and plays that were never staged due to censorship, insufficient resources, or the quandary of an inexistent audience. Seen from one angle these 'unfinished' phenomena are insufficiently modernist, but from another they are emblematic of the precarious status of theatre

in the modern(ist) world and can perhaps offer a new angle on the category around which this volume revolves: after all, even in its most canonical formulations modernism has always betrayed a preoccupation with the fragmentary and unfinished.

Scholars of Latin American literature like to claim precedence by tracing the concept of modernism to the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, who in 1890 hailed the ‘new spirit animating a small but proud and triumphant group of prose writers and poets in Spanish America today: *el modernismo*’ (Darío 1950: 9). Like Darío, these writers cultivated a refined, self-consciously cosmopolitan style, drawing on elements of French symbolism and Parnassian aesthetics while often evoking distant times and exotic locales. The Spanish-American War of 1898 marked the end of the Spanish empire and the expansion of US influence over the region as well as its increasing (if uneven) incorporation into global circuits of commodity exchange; in this context, the modernista cult of beauty and form was often linked to an anti-imperial discourse that derided the utilitarianism and materialism of the United States, and depicted Spanish American intellectuals as heralds of an alternative modernity more attuned to spiritual values and aesthetic sensibilities. This is one explanation for the seeming absence of modernista theatre: because it relies on human actors and a live audience in a physical space, theatre is more resistant to efforts to establish the ‘autonomy’ of art. José Martí, the Cuban independence leader who died in battle against Spain, wrote four plays ranging from a meta-theatrical farce to an indigenous-themed drama, but all predate the emergence of modernismo and only one was staged. Amado Nervo’s *Consuelo* is also an anomaly, if only because it is the libretto for a *zarzuela* (a ‘minor’, commercial genre); and while a case could be made for his *Teatro mínimo* (1898), a series of 31 micro-plays published in Mexican newspapers, these texts – like the handful of other dramas by modernista writers – are rarely read.

And so it is said that with the advent of modernismo, theatre fell behind as narrative and (in particular) poetry took the lead. But the story is not so simple. Most modernistas earned their living as correspondents for newspapers and by writing *crónicas* – anecdotal accounts of events both weighty and trivial that offered impressionistic commentaries on everything from recent literary trends to daily life in the urban milieu. In the absence of a strong publishing market, this journalistic genre became a crucible for the development of modernista aesthetics. Surely, then, it is relevant that an overwhelming number of *crónicas* revolved around the theatre and other types of public spectacle. In Havana, for example, the poet Julián del Casal offered vivid accounts of the construction of a new theatre, the intrigues of entertainment impresarios, and performances of *teatro bufo* (a comic genre involving blackface minstrelsy) as well as shows by touring companies from Spain and the United States. A ‘frenetic admirer of the literary form’ (Casal 1963b: 164), Casal made no attempt to hide his repugnance for the theatre, where the contingencies of performance belied the autonomy of art and both the actors and audience forced one to experience all too viscerally the abominable ‘tyranny of the human visage’ (Casal 1963a: 119). Little wonder that, like most other modernistas, he did not write plays.

Ambivalence or outright aversion toward the stage also shaped the many closet dramas written by modernists in Europe and the United States, and can even be seen in the plays of figures such as Gertrude Stein and Samuel Beckett. But the public (and embodied) aspect of theatre was even more fraught in societies formed and fragmented by colonial rule, and its susceptibility to commodification posed a particular threat

for artists struggling to assert their authority as critics of a reconfiguration of capital and culture in which their region played a subordinate role. Throughout the Caribbean, theatre was censored by colonial authorities, and on the continent the sporadic attempts to establish 'national' theatres following the wars of independence in the early nineteenth century had been stymied by decades of civil war and stark divisions of region, race, language, and class. The export boom at the century's end financed the building of lavish theatre halls in most major cities, but most of the operas and plays performed still came from Europe, and while popular genres such as the *zarzuela* and *bufo* were more attuned to local realities, they were also linked to a mode of mass culture increasingly associated with the United States. Within the mediating space of the *crónica*, modernistas-in-the-making staged the struggle to stake out a terrain for Spanish American art, casting theatre as a performative frontier against which the *reino interior* ('interior realm') of literature was defined.

The historical fragility of literature and theatre in the region also adds a wrinkle to the opposition between modernism and the avant-garde. In 1920, in the wake of the decade-long Mexican Revolution, José Vasconcelos returned from exile to become founding director of the Secretariat of Public Education, a task that involved building scores of libraries and schools, sending teachers to remote regions on mass literacy campaigns, and luring Diego Rivera and other artists back from Europe with the promise of government commissions. Long ago consigned to the dustbin of literary history, Vasconcelos's 'modern tragedy' *Prometeo vencedor* (1916) – a bizarre essay-cum-play that offers the earliest glimpse of his vision of Latin America as the future birthplace of a 'cosmic race' – is akin to many modernist closet dramas in its ostentatious unstageability (highlights include a dead philosopher who materializes out of thin air). Yet as part of his effort to incorporate the post-revolutionary masses into a new institutional and ideological infrastructure, Vasconcelos also spearheaded construction of what he unofficially dubbed his 'Teatro-Estadio' – a 60,000-seat stadium designed for mass spectacles and ballets similar to those in the Soviet Union, a constant reference point for Mexican intellectuals during this era.

It is tempting to see these reenactments of revolutionary triumph and Aztec pageantry as a realization of the avant-garde desire for 'total theatre', but in these early post-revolutionary years plans for performances often fell through, and even the most impressive of those that took place were typically referred to as *ensayos* – 'rehearsals' for a future performance regarded as still unfinished or incomplete. Such was the case of the short-lived Teatro del Murciélago (Theatre of the Bat), a group formed by artists linked to the avant-garde movement known as *estridentismo* and several artist-ethnographers who worked with indigenous communities in staging stylized recreations of their daily lives for each other and for tourists in open-air theatres. Hailed as the germ of a truly Mexican theatre, the project disintegrated almost immediately after its debut. In the 1930s, the expansion of the cultural bureaucracy and emergence of a Popular Front movement sparked another surge of experimentation. The Teatro de la Orientación, led by the anti-vanguard cadre known as *los Contemporáneos*, staged minimalist productions of pieces by Eugene O'Neill and Jean Cocteau along with new works by members, including the existential farces of Xavier Villaurrutia. Arguably more influential, however, were genres such as *teatro radiofónico*, pioneered by the revamped radio station of the Secretariat of Public Education; the dance pantomimes and other variations of *teatro coreográfico*

rehearsed at the new National Dance School; and the *teatro guiñol* puppet movement formed by the mask maker Germán Cueto and his wife Lola (a painter) in collaboration with several of their fellow *ex-estridentistas*. Several pillars of the Mexican canon were involved in such theatrical endeavours, among them Diego Rivera, the printmaker Leopoldo Méndez, the composer Silvestre Revueltas, and the sisters Nellie and Gloria Campobello (both dancers). Yet perhaps because these hybrid forms were so integral to the (re)articulation of other media and arts, many of them disappeared once their work was done. Others (such as *guiñol*) were assimilated into the realm of popular culture, and as a result it is said that Mexican theatre only became ‘modern’ in the 1940s or 1950s.



Figure 45.1 The cover of the programme book for the Teatro del Murciélago offers a fanciful depiction of the folk performance called the ‘Dance of the Moors’. It also reveals the orientalist tendencies common to modernismo and the Mexican avant-gardes.

By contrast, the aims of Argentine theatre artists proved less compatible with the *modus operandi* of the 'modernizing' state. By the 1920s Buenos Aires had a theatre scene unmatched by any other city on the continent: between opera and anarchist theatre lay options including dramas about the gauchos who roamed the pampas and genres such as the tragicomic *grotesco criollo* developed by Armando Discépolo, which depicted the absurdities and despair of the (mostly Italian) working-class immigrants who had been arriving en masse since the late nineteenth century. Alfonsina Storni is remembered as an unfashionably late if unusually erotic modernista poet, though she also served for a time as director of the municipal children's theatre, for which she wrote several plays. Her feminist drama *El amo del mundo* was fiercely critiqued upon its debut in 1927; consequently, she was unable to convince companies to stage her more stylistically experimental 'pyrotechnic' farces, which (like the more popular *grotesco criollo*) borrow elements from the grotesque style of Luigi Pirandello, who visited Argentina and Brazil on a 1927 tour sponsored by Italy's fascist government.

Despite their shared stylistic idioms, few theatre artists in Argentina followed in the footsteps of Pirandello (or of the futurist Marinetti) when the military-backed coup of 6 September 1930 ushered in an 'infamous decade' of right-wing rule. The cruel ironies and incongruities typical of the grotesque acquired an even sharper critical edge in the work of Roberto Arlt, an autodidact whose style was marked by syntactical and grammatical irregularities. Although Arlt remains best known for his novels and *crónicas*, he is also considered a forefather of the *teatro independiente* movement by virtue of his collaborations with the Teatro del Pueblo, a legendary group founded in 1930 and directed by Leónidas Barletta, an anti-fascist who used technically simple, low-budget productions to reach the masses while remaining independent from the market and the state. Arlt tackles these issues in *Saverio el cruel* (debuted in 1936), in which several well-to-do young people trick a humble margarine salesman into playing the part of a military dictator in a farce by convincing him its purpose is to cure one of the participants of her insanity with the shock of simulated violence. An insightful attempt to grapple with theatre's role as a material and ideological apparatus in an era of state spectacle and mass-mediated dreams, the play undercuts the philosophical idealism of Pirandello's *Henry IV* (one of its apparent inter-texts) while critiquing the drive toward hyperrealism and immediacy exemplified by Artaud's call for a theatre of cruelty.

Other artists sought some form of autonomy in Paris, the de facto capital of the Latin American avant-garde. Future Nobel laureate Miguel Angel Asturias studied ethnology at the Sorbonne and immersed himself in surrealist circles during a decade-long hiatus from struggles against the dictators governing his native Guatemala under the influence of the United Fruit Company, a situation he hauntingly evokes in his novel *El señor presidente*. Later hailed as a precursor to the Latin American Boom of the 1960s to 1970s, it was adapted for the stage in 1974 in a production said to mark the coming-of-age of Guatemalan theatre; yet little attention is paid to the dozens of dramatic texts Asturias wrote, including his eight *fantomimas* (a neologism derived from *fantasía* and *pantomima*) and his drama *Cuculcán*, a stab at creating a 'primitive' theatre with talking objects, masks, and cinematographic scenes steeped in indigenous Maya-Quiché myths. Asturias developed his ideas in conversation with the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who spent 12 years in Paris after a stint in jail under the strongman Gerardo Machado. Shortly after arriving Carpentier worked with the

composer Marius François Gaillard on the burlesque tragedy *Yamba-O* (performed at the Théâtre Beriza in 1928), which like his first novel *Ecue-Yamba-O* drew on anthropological studies and his own observations to depict the festivals and religious rites of black Cubans. Carpentier also wrote outlines for two 'Afro-Cuban ballets' with the Cuban composer Amadeo Roldán as well as a script for a puppet opera, and he co-authored a libretto with Robert Desnos and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes for an apocalyptic opera called *The One All Alone* with music by Edgar Varèse – one of many projects Varèse never completed.

Roldán's symphonic suite for the ballet *El milagro de Anaquillé* (*The Miracle of Anaquillé*) debuted in Havana to great acclaim, his *La rebambaramba* also played in Paris and Berlin, but neither was choreographed in France or Cuba, where blackface still held sway and the presence of black actors on a 'serious' stage would have raised a red flag. Not until a year after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 were Carpentier's ballets choreographed and staged by Ramiro Guerra, the director of modern dance at the new Teatro Nacional. That same year also witnessed the re-staging of *Electra Garrigó*, a piece denounced for its insouciant amalgamation of high culture and low-brow humour when it was debuted in 1948 by the Grupo Prometeo, whose director Francisco Morín had recently returned from studying with Erwin Piscator in New York and sought to achieve the 'essential theatre'. Virgilio Piñera's first staged play, *Electra Garrigó* is a brazen re-write of the Greek tragedy of Electra that transplants the characters to a bourgeois household in modern-day (though neo-colonial) Havana: the patriarch Agamemnon (still alive in this version) wanders around in a toga searching for his tragic destiny while the Chorus (portrayed as peasants) foretells the deaths of the patriarch and matriarch to the tune of 'Guantanamera', and the existentialist heroine soliloquizes to the 'non-gods', despite a suggestion from the Tutor (a Centaur) that she stop making speeches and 'make a revolution' instead.

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, the national stage remained more patently imaginary and incomplete. The US territory of Puerto Rico became a 'free associated state' in 1952, leaving it in a condition of limbo whose social and psychic effects are allegorized in the dramas of René Marqués. In the British West Indies the struggles around independence in 1962 prompted attempts to overcome what Derek Walcott described as the colonized man's fear that 'his voice, colour and body were no match for the civilized concepts of theatre' (1970: 18). In 1950, Walcott established the St Lucia Arts Guild, a theatre group directed by his brother Roderick; in 1959 he moved on to found the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, which gained renown with its production of Walcott's own *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Meanwhile in the French colonies, similar efforts were delayed by France's repressive attempts to stem the global tide of decolonization. In 1965, when Édouard Glissant returned to his native Martinique, he noted the lack of trained theatre artists and pieces composed in Créole. This absence, he argued, was symptomatic of the island's origins in the violent rupture of the Middle Passage and slavery – a trauma reactivated after abolition when the Antilles became consumer colonies of France and were deprived of any self-sustaining capacity of their own (Glissant 1971).

Given this, it is not surprising that Glissant's only play is a quasi-closet drama. In 1961, he published a tragedy about the final days of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the brilliant leader of the Haitian Revolution who was captured and deported to die in France. Although Glissant resided in Paris, his support of the Algerian Revolution hindered his access to French theatres, and he was prohibited from returning home after he

co-founded an organization advocating independence for the Antilles. Faced with this political impasse and finding the here-and-now of live performance foreclosed, he constructed what he called a 'prophetic vision of the past': a spectral stage (Glissant 1989 [1971]: 64). Set in a confined space that doubles as Toussaint's cell and the island of Saint-Domingue, *Monsieur Toussaint* reenacts the entire Revolution, yet all the dramatic action takes place out of sight, and the phantasmal characters who call Toussaint to account for his actions seem antithetical to the ethos of embodiment. When it was finally performed ten years later it was on the radio programme France-Culture, and although a stage version was debuted by the Parisian-based Théâtre Noir in 1977, even its admirers note that the play seems out of place on the physical stage.

Displacement and disjuncture also mark the theatre of Glissant's compatriot Aimé Césaire, leader of the surrealist-affiliated *négritude* movement since the 1930s. Césaire, too, explored the obstacles to decolonization by turning back to the Haitian Revolution, though like Derek Walcott, whose verse play *Henri Christophe* (1949) forms part of a Haitian Trilogy, he focused on the illiterate black general who became a despotic king after the French defeat. *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963) was developed in collaboration with Jean-Marie Serreau, a French director who later staged Césaire's rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at its debut in Tunisia in 1968. As if to underscore the play's implications for the new nation-states in Africa, King Christophe was performed by Douta Sek, a Senagalese actor who would also play Patrice Lumumba in Césaire's *Saison au Congo* and starred in the radio production of Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* alongside Toto Bissainthe, a Haitian actress and singer whose role in creating an international black theatre is often obscured by the privilege accorded to the playwrights and their male protagonists.

It would be convenient to end this chapter here, with a region whose island geography and belated or ongoing colonial condition are emblematic of the unfinished quality I propose as a key characteristic of Latin American modernist theatre. Instead I turn now to Brazil. Whereas in Spanish America modernismo preceded the avant-gardes, in Brazil the two terms are nearly synonymous. Brazilian modernismo is typically depicted as a quest for cultural autonomy and a rejection of the artificiality attributed to Brazilian Parnassianism (stylistically similar to Spanish-American modernismo). However, a certain irony attends the fact that the event around which it cohered – the much-storied Week of Modern Art of 1922 – took place in an opera hall. Completed in 1911, São Paulo's Theatro Municipal was a social hub for the local coffee oligarchy and was designed to host touring companies from Europe, since Brazil had none of its own. Adding to the irony, the Week of Modern Art featured sculpture, painting, prose, poetry, architecture, music, and dance, but no new theatre. The writer and musicologist Mário de Andrade underscored this lack in a satirical portrayal of the event called 'As Enfibraturas do Ipiranga' ('The Moral Fibrature of the Ipiranga') – a mock libretto for a 'profane oratorio' with a cast of 550,000 singers and musicians in which the avant-garde battles conservative sectors of São Paulo in a song contest (spoiler alert: the innovators lose). A few years later, inspired by two voyages up the Amazon and to the Northeast during which he collected songs and witnessed the ritual dance-dramas of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities, Andrade worked with Heitor Villa-Lobos and other composers to create a 'national' opera incorporating these traditions; in some cases the music was publicly performed, but most of the libretti remained unfinished.

Why write operas intended for the archives, as if the archives were the underbelly of the stage? Mário de Andrade was one of the few visibly mixed-race modernistas, and he no doubt knew that, like Carpentier's Afro-Cuban ballets, his operatic allegories of cultural miscegenation would have faced imposing obstacles given the taboo against dark-skinned actors, except in *revistas* (musical revues) and other mass cultural genres. The full force of this prohibition would fall on the ephemeral Teatro da Experiência housed in São Paulo's Clube dos Artistas Modernos and directed by the architect and multimedia artist Flávio de Carvalho. Established two years after the top-down Revolution of 1930, the club was frequented by a mix of intellectuals, communist and anarchist activists, and working-class immigrants; yet what led the authorities to take action was *O Bailado do Deus Morto*, an incantatory performance piece by Carvalho and Henricão (a black samba composer) and performed by a nearly all-black cast who danced around a dead (white) god. In November 1933 the police closed the theatre, and as a result an expectant audience never saw Oswald de Andrade's *O Homem e o Cavalo* – an anti-fascist spectacle of world history starring Cleopatra, Fu-Man-Chu, talking horses, the Voice of Stalin, and a poet-soldier who foretells Hitler's genocide of the Jews.

Instead, *teatro moderno* (not *modernista*) begins in the 1940s with Nelson Rodrigues, a self-styled 'reactionary' who delighted in rankling the censors with works about the dark desires and lurid lives of Rio's (lower) middle classes, blending Greek tragedy, German expressionism, and pulp fiction in a style reminiscent of Eugene O'Neill. In 1945 the Rio-based, all-black Teatro Experimental do Negro



Figure 45.2 *O Bailado do Deus Morto*, performed at the Teatro da Experiência in São Paulo by an almost entirely black cast (only the titular dead god was white).

From *Diário da Noite*, 15 November 1933.

broke new ground with its interpretation of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. Throughout the 1950s an economic boom helped put Brazilian architecture and art on the modernist map; and then, following the 1964 military coup, a theatrical spectre reared its head. In 1967, in what would become a landmark of the Tropicália counterculture movement, São Paulo's Teatro Oficina debuted Oswald de Andrade's second, never-performed play *O Rei da Vela* (*The Candle King*), a loose remake of Alfred Jarry's absurdist farce *King Ubu* that dramatizes a crystal-clear thesis: until the Brazilian working classes destroy the mechanisms of economic imperialism, the promise of an end to underdevelopment will remain nothing but a mirage. The production 'cannibalized' high opera, avant-garde stylistics, and mass media pop, mixing Brechtian strategies with a heavy dose of Artaud and drawing parallels with the current military regime. As the director José Celso later explained, 'the problem was of the *here and now*. And the *here and now* was found in 1933 in Oswald de Andrade's *The Candle King*' (qtd. in Prado 1993: 27).

It is a fortuitous coincidence that when Teatro Oficina took the play on the road to France the following year it premiered in Paris right in the thick of May 1968, on the infamous Night of the Barricades when student strikers confronted police in a battle that led to a real, would-be revolution. This event, which shadows many subsequent accounts of modernism, was itself haunted by the history of the artistic and political struggles that *The Candle King* registers but pointedly refuses to resolve. In a similar spirit, this chapter is intended to encourage further research and reflection, but I also want to suggest that as we reimagine and reorganize the field of modernist studies, we should resist the temptation to rethink our way out of the problems 'modernist theatre in Latin America' presents. The imperfect translations, performative failures, and delayed debuts mark material contradictions, historical impasses, and ongoing inequalities that cannot be resolved by new ideas alone. At the same time, these unfinished elements can help illuminate those alternative, unrealized (im) possibilities that have always been part and parcel of modernism.

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

BEYOND CENTRE-PERIPHERY

Modernism in Latin American art



Tatiana Flores

Defining modernism in Latin American art entails addressing issues pertaining to colonialism, self-definition, and social justice. Content and context are crucial to Latin American modernism; formalist approaches, on the other hand, are insufficient and often detrimental to its understanding. Unlike the hermeticism that characterized some facets of modernism in Europe and the United States, Latin American modernism was not driven primarily by formal innovation and self-reflexivity, but directed towards an engagement with the world. Indeed, certain scholars describe Latin American modernism as a subversive practice. Andrea Giunta considers Latin American modernism as ‘an ideological inversion of values’ (1996: 64). Similarly, referring to the avant-garde in Brazil, Sérgio B. Martins claims that ‘it did not simply take modernism on a detour – it actually hijacked it’ (2013: 2).

Because the trajectory followed by Latin American art does not quite run parallel to that of European modernism, it poses a challenge to the conventional periodization of twentieth-century artistic movements or tendencies. Boris Groys posits that modernist art ‘was supposed to effectuate a radical break with the past, to erase and destroy the past, to achieve a zero point of artistic tradition – and by doing so to give a new start to a new future’ (2008: 71). By contrast, according to Terry Smith, who discusses the distinction between modernity, postmodernity, and contemporaneity, the word ‘contemporary’ describes

a broad, worldwide situation, the most definitive characteristic of which is the experience – at once subjective and objective, individual yet shared, entirely particular while being inescapable for all – of being immersed to an unprecedented degree in a world marked by unprecedented diversity and depth of difference.

(2013: 17)

Whereas Latin American modernism did share in the utopian ideals described by Groys, though less so the desire to destroy the past, it also exhibits the qualities of contemporaneity described by Smith. As a colonial creation, the region known today as Latin America was from its inception marked by ‘unprecedented diversity and depth of difference’, not only through the coexistence of Indigenous natives, African

slaves, and European-descended Creoles in the same territory, but also through the massive influx of migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Artists from former colonies of Spain and Portugal living in neo-colonial conditions – or a state of ‘internal colonialism’ vis-à-vis native peoples and populations of African descent (Mignolo 2005: 65) – in the early twentieth century were well aware of modernity as a ‘European phenomenon’, as described by Enrique Dussel (1995: 65). Dussel argues for ‘1492 [as] the moment of the “birth” of modernity as a concept, the moment of origin of a very particular myth of sacrificial violence’, adding that ‘it also marks the origin of a process of concealment or misrecognition of the non-European’ (65, 66). Modernist production in Latin America, often concerned with social justice and aware of the need to address – if not redress – centuries of inequality, frequently turned to the non-European as its subject and adopted an oppositional stance against European imperialism, including its cultural heritage. Establishing a regional or local collective identity distinct from that of the colonizers was fundamental to its dynamics.

Approaches that challenge conventional ways of structuring knowledge are useful models for thinking about modernist production in Latin America. David Joselit advocates ‘discard[ing] the concept of *medium* (along with its mirror image, the postmedium)’ in assessing contemporary art (2013: 2). ‘This category privileges discrete objects,’ he explains, whereas his intention is ‘to expand the definition of art to embrace heterogeneous configurations of relationships’ (2). As regards Latin American avant-garde movements of the 1920s – which grew out of conversations between art and literature, fostered regional dialogues through correspondence and travel, and may be mapped out in the pages of short-lived magazines but often left no other trace – to think in terms of networks or ‘heterogeneous configurations’ is fundamental. In 1928, Havana’s *Revista de Avance* disseminated the survey, ‘What Should American Art Be?’, asking its readers questions that reveal a preoccupation with achieving regional artistic autonomy and thinking through modernism as something to be done and not simply a style to be inherited.¹ Accompanying the survey was a drawing by an unidentified artist, of a lighthouse, perhaps Havana’s own Faro del Morro, a beacon disseminating light but also recalling a radio tower with the presence of four antenna-like vertical lines (Fig. 46.1). The structure could be likened to a node within a network, both transmitting and receiving information.

The illustration is typical of the visual culture of early twentieth-century Latin American modernisms, images that exist in hard-to-find magazines but frequently vanish otherwise. They seem to have been made with mass publication in mind, often taking the form of prints or ink drawings, and recall the words of Walter Benjamin in describing the effects of mechanical reproduction on the art of his time: ‘They neutralize a number of traditional concepts – such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery’ (2008 [1936]: 20). Joselit provides a useful commentary: ‘According to Benjamin, aura results from *site specificity*. [...] Reproduction jeopardizes “the historical testimony” and the “authority of the object.”’ It eliminates distance in time and space by making the image nomadic’ (2013: 14). The deracinated image, along with accompanying texts, helped Latin American intellectuals, separated by geography, establish regional dialogues, debating issues around aesthetics, philosophy, and politics and contributing to the consolidation of an Americanist consciousness. It allowed them to avoid being restricted by their spatial dislocation

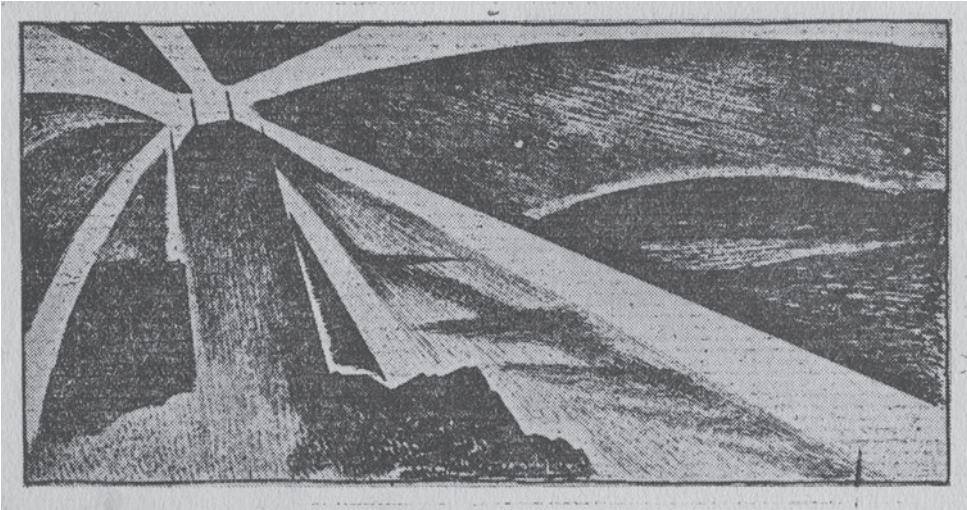


Figure 46.1 Unidentified artist, *Lighthouse*, 1928, published with the survey ‘What Should American Art Be?’, *Revista de Avance* (Havana, 15 September 1928), p. 235. The University of Miami, Cuban Heritage Collection.

and to take an active role in shaping the most current critical discussions, thereby challenging the limitations of inhabiting the ‘periphery’.

The Mexican poet Manuel Maples Arce certainly refused to be constrained by time and space when he distributed his avant-garde manifesto *Actual No. 1* in late December 1921. Not only did he paper the walls of Mexico City with it, he also sent it by mail to other writers throughout Europe. A celebration of modern technology, the text revelled in the world’s interconnectedness as a result of such innovations as the radio, telegraph, and airplane (Flores 2013). Other authors did not share his enthusiasm for fast-paced modernity. His rival, the Mexican poet Jaime Torres Bodet, saw incipient globalization as a detriment to the establishment of a collective Latin American identity:

How can we demand to see individual artistic and literary identities in today’s Latin American republics? Especially when everything seems to be conspiring against it: the speed of international communications, the rapid penetration of exotic cultures, and the increasing abandonment of the colonial tradition, a small, hazy refuge against the Americanization of the spirit which the other manifestation – the Americanness of the machine – is anxious to devour.

(Torres Bodet 1928: 376)

Torres Bodet’s assessment uses ‘American’ not in the pan-Americanist sense that Latin American intellectuals understood the term but, rather, as relating to the United States. In Cuba especially, ‘América’ would have been read in the context of José Martí’s 1891 treatise ‘Nuestra América’ (‘Our America’), an appeal for Latin American unity (though the word ‘Latin’ is not employed), especially against the threat of US imperialism. Demarcating América’s geography ‘from [the] Río Grande to the Strait of Magellan’, including ‘the sorrowful islands of the sea’, Martí

distinguished between the ‘two halves of the continent’ (1891: 127, 126). Throughout the early twentieth century, the desire among modernist thinkers to consolidate a Latin American identity involved both shedding its European imperial identity and differentiating itself from ‘the formidable neighbor’, América’s ‘greatest danger’, the United States (126, 127).

The search for an autochthonous art began in the 1910s through a few isolated figures. The following decade was one of widespread experimentation, dialogue, and debate, which witnessed the consolidation of the avant-garde as a group activity. The 1930s saw the rise of social realism, particularly Mexican muralism, which made a profound impact throughout the hemisphere, inspiring similar efforts to use art as a vehicle for political action and mass appeal. Concurrently, surrealism offered an alternative to figurative didactic art, championing free expression of the unfettered imagination. Allowing for other narratives beyond the formalist, progressivist, Eurocentric account, it carved out a space for Latin America within the history of art. Stylistically opposed, geometric abstraction from the 1940s to the 1960s reintroduced rationality and structure and revisited the possibility of utopia, signalling the potential of the Americas to become an art world centre and a beacon of hope after the devastation wrought by the Second World War. It accompanied infrastructural modernization ventures and projected the desire for Latin America to gain prominence on a global stage, economically, politically, and aesthetically. The rise of military dictatorships from the 1940s onwards signalled a new turn for Latin American art, marking the end of the modernist era. As repressive conditions grew and multiplied, the intraregional dialogue among artists and intellectuals diminished considerably. Politically charged conceptual art forms, often reacting to local conditions, replaced collective modes of expression and common styles. Most notably, the sense of optimism that had pervaded Latin American modernism now gave way to an interrogation of the fundamental purpose of art and a rejection of regional classification.

The first manifestations of modernism in Latin American art often coincided with artists’ European sojourns in the second decade of the twentieth century. Through their travels, they gained access to diverse artistic communities and engaged with local modernists. Diego Rivera (Mexico) learned the practice of cubism from careful study of Picasso’s work and forged a friendship with the painter. His celebrated cubist paintings often incorporate objects from other parts of the world, including a Russian balalaika, woven Mexican *petate*, or straw mat, and a traditional Spanish jug (*botijo*), betraying a self-consciousness of his own status as a foreigner in Paris. Joaquín Torres-García and Rafael Barradas (both from Uruguay) lived for a while in Barcelona and participated in the activities of Spanish avant-gardists, especially those associated with the avant-garde movement *ultraísmo*. Together, they forged a new visual language, vibrationism, which fused elements of cubism and futurism and revelled especially in urban scenes emphasizing the hustle and bustle of the modern city. Anita Malfatti (Brazil) passed through Berlin and New York in the teens and returned to Europe the following decade, settling in Paris. She was especially drawn to expressionist approaches to painting. Emilio Pettoruti (Argentina) made his base in Italy, travelling throughout the country before taking up residence in Rome in 1917. He exhibited with the futurists, contributing abstract charcoal drawings to their oeuvre but never fully identifying as a futurist himself.

Works by Latin American artists during this early modernist phase delight in formal experimentation, especially by contrast to the staid academic aesthetics that dominated elite art in their respective countries. Modernism would become more widespread in the 1920s, when, through dialogues with returning travellers but to a larger extent through the extensive dissemination of information on current artistic tendencies through the mass media, artists ascertained multiple possibilities, not only for renovating visual language, but also for pondering the purpose of art and the role of the artist in society. World events influenced the direction and tenor of these conversations. In Europe, the aftermath of the First World War brought with it a turn towards a new classicism, commonly known as *rappel à l'ordre* or 'return to order'. The project of the historical avant-gardes for radical aesthetic and social transformation was deemed suspect, and many artists turned instead to more traditional forms of representation (Buchloh 1981). By contrast, the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) was widely perceived as a promising model for political change, and though it did not share the Marxist bases of the Russian Revolution, it quickly became enveloped in socialist rhetoric. The consequences of these two major events were manifold. On the one hand, intellectuals in the Americas framed the Great War as proof of Europe's decadence and Latin America's ascendancy, inspired in part by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918), among others. On the other, Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural policy, which placed art and education front and centre, provided an example for how a state's commitment to fomenting creative expression could help free the nations of the Americas from their cultural dependency on Europe.

Over the course of the decade, critical debates on the relation between politics and aesthetics and on what should be the direction of contemporary art and culture abounded. Intellectuals who influenced the direction of Latin American thought during these years included José Vasconcelos (Mexico), José Carlos Mariátegui (Peru), Mário de Andrade (Brazil), and Vicente Huidobro (Chile). These and other cultural figures were often the subject of portraits by modernist artists, further attesting to common networks, amicable bonds, and the interpenetration of art and literature. Indeed, much of the artwork produced during the 1920s was figurative in nature, but it was an experimental figuration that should not be interpreted in the same light as the European *rappel à l'ordre* aesthetic, deemed regressive by such critics as Benjamin Buchloh. Figurative art in Latin America offered both challenges and solutions to addressing critical issues related to social justice, self-definition, and aesthetic autonomy. Its major exemplar was Mexican muralism, which emerged in 1921 and continued to impact Latin American art and discourse well into the 1960s. In the 1920s, it was a decidedly avant-garde practice, which attempted to reconcile formal innovation and social consciousness, as seen through the work of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Fernando Leal, and Jean Charlot. Modernists in other countries adopted more idiosyncratic approaches to figuration – from the jewel-like colours, planar forms, and fanciful visions of Xul Solar (Argentina) to the indefinite contours, open brushwork, and packed compositions of Eduardo Abela (Cuba), to the expressive directness and elevation of anonymous subjects in the portraits of José Sabogal (Peru), to the smooth, bounded surfaces of the seemingly guileless idylls of Tasila do Amaral (Brazil).

Latin American artists did not adopt abstraction until the 1940s, though it would not have been unfamiliar to them because of their proximity to pre-Columbian cultures

and living Indigenous traditions. Given the vogue of all things ‘primitive’ in Europe, they may have opted against abstract art as an anti-colonial gesture, so as to avoid appropriating the cultural artifacts of ancestral civilizations and oppressed Indigenous groups in the present. It may also not have held the same fascination for them as for European artists; certain figures, nevertheless, did experiment briefly with abstraction inspired by pre-Columbian art during the 1920s, including Elena Izcue (Peru), Lola Cueto (Mexico), and Fermín Revueltas (Mexico). The following decade, Torres-García became the foremost proponent of exploring the forms and concepts of pre-Columbian abstraction for creating a ‘universal’ aesthetic that would place the cultural production of the Americas in the vanguard. As with abstraction, the landscape, a genre of widespread appeal in the nineteenth century, was also less common as a vehicle for early modernist production, though exceptional practitioners included Armando Reverón (Venezuela), Dr. Atl (Mexico), and Tarsila do Amaral. The modernist image par excellence of the 1920s, as mentioned earlier, was that which could lend itself to mechanical reproduction, especially woodblock prints and ink drawings, such as those circulating in journals and illustrated books by Norah Borges (Argentina), Gabriel Fernández Ledesma (Mexico), and Carlos Enríquez (Cuba).

The Great Depression and the rise of European fascism in the 1930s cast a pall over the carefree exuberance of the ‘roaring twenties’, and the visual production of this and the following decade gained a greater sense of urgency. Mexican muralism made a great impact hemispherically, as political imagery became ubiquitous and social realism grew to be the dominant artistic mode. Artists continued to foster regional networks, and their travels began to prioritize the Americas rather than including the obligatory trip to Paris. In addition to public art, ideologically charged paintings and prints circulated widely. In Mexico, the Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphics Workshop), founded in 1937 by Leopoldo Méndez, Pablo O’Higgins, and Luis Arenal, produced scores of prints proclaiming the artists’ adherence to social causes. In the Andean countries, such artists as Sabogal, Camilo Blas, and Julia Codesido (Peru) and Camilo Egas and Oswaldo Guayasamín (Ecuador) promoted *indigenismo*, focusing on representations of Indigenous natives, whether in situations of exploitation or recalling an idyllic and irretrievable past as a means to condemn the injustices of the present. In Brazil and the Caribbean, attention turned towards peoples of African descent as representative of the oppressed underclasses, as in the work of Cândido Portinari (Brazil), or purveyors of celebrated cultural traditions, seen through the paintings of Yoryi Morel (Dominican Republic) and Oscar García Rivera (Cuba). Argentine social realism focused instead on issues of labour and the struggles of recent immigrants; its most important proponent was Antonio Berni.

Contemporaneous with social realism, surrealism offered an argument against the notion that figuration was the only alternative for a politically committed art. In the words of André Breton, ‘we expressly oppose the view that it is possible to create a work of art or even, properly considered, any useful work by expressing only the manifest content of an age. On the contrary, Surrealism proposes to express its latent content’ (1936, qtd. in Baackmann and Craven 2009: iv). The study of surrealism in Latin America has been hindered by its association with the rightfully maligned notion of the ‘art of the fantastic’, especially when used as a descriptor of the region’s ‘essence’ (Ramírez 1992: 63). It is productive instead to read the works of such artists as Wifredo

Lam (Cuba), Cicero Dias (Brazil), Roberto Matta (Chile), Hector Hyppolite (Haiti), Rufino Tamayo (Mexico), and Frida Kahlo (Mexico), who sustained significant dialogues with Breton, as subversive, socially critical, and potentially emancipatory. These artists, along with many others, employed visual fragmentation, unexpected juxtapositions, paradox, and incongruous imagery in a refusal to be constrained by dogmatic realism, Western rationality, progressivist worldviews, and artistic hierarchies. Lam's *The Jungle* cites the composition of Picasso's *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) as a means to create an even more daring, confrontational, and enigmatic scene that upsets the boundaries between male and female, human and animal, and nature and culture, confirming Lam's own characterization of his 'painting as an act of decolonization' (qtd. in Baackmann and Craven 2009: i).

The rise of geometric abstraction in the post-Second-World-War era marked a significant stylistic shift from the art of the previous decades. Structurally, it critiqued both social realism and surrealism for being overly bound to representation, an attitude confirmed by artists' writings. It was also heavily invested in notions of universalism and utopia. According to Serge Guilbaut, in the Cold War, 'abstract art in its pure form became a symbol of individual creativity, of a unique separate, and modern entity free of everyday concerns, the philosophical expression of a modern, urban, rational world' (2009: 168). After the horrors of the war, it may have been difficult to sustain this optimism in Europe, but Latin America was ready to pick up the baton in the hopes of becoming 'an egalitarian network of postwar "international art centers" that emerged to displace Paris as art capital of the Western world' (Fox 2013: 5). The region saw dramatic economic growth in these years and gained new international visibility in the political and cultural realms. Museums of modern art were founded throughout the region from the 1940s onwards, and the São Paulo Bienal was established in 1951, 'bringing together for the first time in Latin America the art of Europeans and North Americas as well as Latin Americans' (Barnitz 2001: 144).

Geometric abstraction was not the only variant of abstract art to emerge during this time; another principal mode was a gestural kind of painting emphasizing surface textures and with possible referents in the ancient cultures of the Americas. Various referred to as lyrical, ancestral, or informal abstraction, it was practiced by Fernando de Szyszlo (Peru), Manabu Mabe (Brazil), Olga Albizu (Puerto Rico), and Gunther Gerszo (Mexico). Other artists, including Amelia Peláez (Cuba), Armando Morales (Nicaragua), and Alejandro Obregón (Colombia), engaged in sustained formal experimentation without fully abandoning representation. In contrast to geometric abstraction, these other abstract and abstracting tendencies could be read in continuity with surrealism or earlier examples of figurative art. Geometric abstraction proposed instead a new point of departure for Latin American modernism.

Beginning in the mid-1940s in Argentina, with the rise of the Madi group – integrated by Carmelo Arden Quin, Rhod Rothfuss, Gyula Kosice, and Diyi Laaň, among others – and the Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención, founded by Tomás Maldonado, geometricism based on pure formal structure with no referents in external reality became the dominant visual language for Latin American art during much of the second half of the twentieth century. In Brazil, it manifested first around architecture in the 1940s, and then through the emergence of the avant-garde Grupo Ruptura in São Paulo in 1952, with the artists Waldemar Cordeiro and Luiz Sacilotto and Grupo Frente in Rio de Janeiro in 1954, founded by Ivan Serpa. Both of these

movements were designated as *concretismo*, or concrete art, following especially the model provided by the sculptures and texts of Max Bill (Switzerland), who held a solo show in São Paulo and was later awarded a prize at the first Bienal in 1951. In 1959, the writer Ferreira Gullar launched the neo-concrete manifesto in Rio, criticizing the excessive rationality of concretismo and urging instead for art to be closer to bodily experience, breaking the boundaries between art and life. Among Gullar's supporters were Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Amílcar do Castro, and Lygia Pape, artists whose works depended on viewer movement or interaction to become activated, such as in Oiticica's *Grand Nucleus* (Fig. 46.2). In the late 1950s and following, the Venezuelan artists Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, and Alejandro Otero, all of whom developed distinctive individual languages based on exploration of lines, planes, or colour, also pioneered bodies of work that called forth a new dynamic between the spectator and the object through real and implied motion. This tendency, known as kinetic art, was also evident in the work of the Argentineans Julio Le Parc and Rogelio Polesello. Notable among the *neoconcretistas* and kinetic artists was that geometry became the basis for exploring the movement and behaviour of bodies, the breakdown between object and spectator, and the insertion of art into lived spaces, challenging the assumption that art was merely a vehicle for a visual experience to be contained in a museum.



Figure 46.2 *Grand Nucleus*, NC3, NC4, NC6, 1960–3.
Photo: César Oiticica Filho. © César and Claudio Oiticica.

Latin American modernism moved through distinct phases from the 1910s to the 1970s, exhibiting divergent styles and multiple aesthetic possibilities. What social realism, surrealism, and geometric art had in common was the faith in art's potential to create emancipatory experiences, whether on an individual, collective, or social basis. They were also concerned with establishing regional dialogues and fostering common creative expressions. With the rise of military dictatorships, however, artists turned inwards to address urgent issues in their particular countries, and though regional dialogue was maintained by art critics and curators, artists themselves tended to drop out of the conversation that they had so actively promoted earlier in the century.

NOTE

1. An English translation of the survey, some of its responses, and a contemporary analysis of them are published in Olea, Ramírez and Ybarra-Frausto (eds) (2012): 373–89.

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PART VII

MIDDLE EAST AND
THE ARAB WORLD



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CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

ACCOMMODATING AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

The intellectual trends of modernity in the Middle East



Kaveh Tagharobi and Ali Zarei

Exploring modernity and its intellectual trends in the Middle East is a very fitting endeavour, as ‘Middle East’ itself is a ‘modern’ term which has only become common since the early twentieth century. The fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 and its partitioning into Turkey and the new Arab countries was a key moment in the evolution of the region known as the Middle East. The emergence of new nation-states and their encounter with the modern West led to other influential political and cultural events, which in turn contributed to the experience of modernity and modernism. These experiences differ from country to country; however, we can give a brief account of modernity and modernism in this region by breaking it down into the Arab-speaking world, including Egypt, Iraq, Bilad Al-Sham (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine) and Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya) on one hand; and Iran and Turkey on the other.¹ Modernism in the Middle East corresponds to three main intellectual currents in which a will to change was manifest among thinkers, activists, and artists. The first movements toward reform started in the nineteenth century and culminated with the introduction of constitutions and parliaments into the Persian,² Arab, and Ottoman monarchies. The second current of modernism was concerned with what can be called ‘nativism’. This period saw Middle Eastern intellectuals looking for native sources of progress and success, as opposed to the first period, which was characterized by a fascination with the West. In the third intellectual current, a strong desire for development opens the way for more liberal values, causing fundamental shifts in the political sphere. In this period, academics try to analyze their societies with the modern critical tools they have borrowed from Western disciplines. While aesthetic modernism flourished in these three periods, the intellectual experience of modernity has faced problems. Facing modernity at a time of decline, the rapid rhythm of the events in the last 100 years, and the colonial presence of the West have complicated the politically unstable Middle East, making the transition into modernity a rough path.

THREE WAVES OF MODERNITY

The first period is characterised by constitutionalism, parliamentarism, literary experimentation, and a call to transform traditional ways of thinking and living. The first attempts made by Middle Eastern thinkers, activists, and artists to bring about change were made in the mid to late nineteenth century. During this time, Arab, Ottoman, and Persian intellectuals began attending to the outside world, visiting Europe, translating Western literature, and learning about Western scientific and technological advancements. Many started to ask about the reasons behind the West's success and their own countries' underdevelopment. This is a period of constitutionalism when intellectuals in Egypt, Persia, and Turkey/Ottoman Empire, captivated by the Western values of democracy and enlightenment, tried to modernize their societies by promoting development, progress, and liberal values. Constitutionalism in Persia, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire was a turning-point leading to the diverse aspects of modernization in the following decades. Liberal landowners and merchants, military commanders, European-educated intellectuals, journalists, literary figures, and proletarian activists all helped introduce constitutionalism into Middle Eastern monarchies, although later on they split into separate groups with their own goals and plans.

Ironically, it was the existence of Westerners in the Middle East that triggered the will to change in the region. The Western presence in the Middle East started for economic reasons as a consequence of industrialization and the need for natural resources, and led to Western cultural and political domination in the region.³ The West was present in the Middle East through ambassadors, missionaries, travellers and, more prominently, European colonial projects. Direct contact with Western modernity encouraged some Middle Eastern leaders to adopt modern socio-political structures. Becoming aware of the developments in the West, Middle Eastern intellectuals tried to revolutionize their own cultural, social, and political situation. Learning about the new sciences and reforming political structures became significant. During this period, the centuries-old Ottoman Empire experienced some structural and conceptual change through a series of reforms called *Tanzimât* (1839) that led to The First Constitutional Era (1867). Influential in these changes were literary figures and intellectuals – most notably a secret society called The Young Ottomans (established in 1865) who were familiar with European thought and saw the old concepts and structures both in politics and the arts as insufficient for the needs of the modern world. Around the same time, Persian intellectuals like Mirza Malkam Khan and Fathali Akhundzadeh became outspoken critics of monarchy. In Egypt, while scholars like Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti and Rifa'a al-Tahtawi laid the intellectual foundations of the Arab renaissance, Mohammad Ali Pasha started a series of economic and cultural reforms partly due to his relationship with the West and partly under the influence of the landowners, politicians, and intellectuals who aimed at limiting his power. Ali and his successors wanted to establish a modern state according to the European model, and to do so, the Egyptian military, bureaucracy, culture, society, and politics had to be modernized. In the early nineteenth century, Ali sent the first cohort of Egyptian students to Europe, a decision almost simultaneously taken in Iran.

Literature was closely connected with social and political modernization in the nineteenth-century Middle East. Most of the influential figures in modern political and

social structures were also concerned with revolutionizing the deeply rooted traditional forms of literature. Amir Kabir, Persia's Sadr-e a'zam (prime minister) (1848–51), considered by some to be one of Iran's leading modernizers, thought of conventional Persian poetry as 'detrimental to "progress" and "modernization" in Iranian society, which he believed was in dire need of change' (Ghanoonparvar 1998: 291). Middle Eastern literary figures started to adopt the new forms and structures they saw in Western literature. New genres such as the novel and drama emerged for the first time, and the long tradition of poetry, which had kept its conventions for over 14 centuries, met new themes and subjects, entering the realm of social and political issues, as opposed to the more personal and mystical poetry that was dominant before. The Persian, Arabic, and Turkish languages experienced new possibilities, as new diction and structures emerged. This was also a time when the West paid attention to Persian literature. Translations of classical Persian poetry were introduced to the Western audience by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Edward FitzGerald, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Matthew Arnold. It is also the high age of Orientalism. Through their study of Middle Eastern literature and history, Western scholars influenced Middle Eastern intellectuals' consciousness of their position in history.

Despite the timely response of literature to the call for change, the modern literature in the constitutional period did not reach significant depth and maturity in most cases. The novel in particular, as the modern epic and a middle-class genre, was warmly welcomed by Middle Eastern writers; however, it is not easy to find nineteenth-century novels that are masterpieces. In Iran, constitutionalists like Akhundzadeh and Abdul'Rahim Talibov attempted to write modern plays and novels, but it took a century before these new forms were fully understood by Iranian writers. In Turkey, while Tevfik Fikret founded the modern school of Turkish poetry, Turkish poetry only freed itself from the conventions of Ottoman literature in the mid twentieth century. During the first round of change in the Middle East, modern literary forms were primarily seen as a way of supporting social and political reform, while their aesthetic dimensions were secondary.

Since the attempts to break the thick ice of tradition and lack of social and political consciousness in this period are among the first of their kind, they only managed to scratch the surface rather than making fundamental and meaningful breakthroughs. Translating Western philosophical works was, for example, one way to broaden the horizons of Middle Eastern thinkers. The first philosophical text to be translated into Persian was Descartes' *Discourse on Method* in 1900 with the support of Arthur de Gobineau. Despite its influence on modern *Iranian* philosophy, this essay was not fully understood at the time, due to the epistemological differences between the old and modern paradigms (Tabatabai 2013: 96–7). Unsurprisingly, the theoretical and critical dimensions of modernity were not deeply understood. Both the Persian constitutionalists and Arabs after their own cultural renaissance (*Al-Nahda*) were mesmerized with the surface structures of the Western life and society, importing modern political terms and technology as their first priority. But they were looking at the modern world through a different paradigm that had drifted far from critical and analytical traditions through the centuries. As a result, it could not follow the path of the modern Western subject in fundamentally questioning the world, making them unable to be as effective in forming analytical and critical discourses in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.

The main feature of the Middle East's second phase of intellectual modernization was an emphasis on domestic sources of thought and development under leftist influences, when the will to change was manifesting through nativism. This period culminated after the Second World War and gradually lost its velocity in the last decades of the twentieth century. As Boroujerdi (1996) notes, during this time Western colonialism was met with nativism throughout the Third World. No longer attracted by the novelty of Western technology and development, nativists reacted against capitalism along three lines: nationalism, Marxism, and Islam. During this period, there were nativist groups and organizations with various combinations of religious, nationalistic, and leftist values.

While nativist intellectuals believed in reliance on domestic capacities for modernization, they often had different resources in mind. Some, like Sayyid Qutb, the leading member of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, believed that Muslims could find everything they needed in Islam and saw European imperialism as the main cause of modern *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic 'ignorance,' or according to Bruce Lawrence's Marxist analogy, 'false consciousness' [2005: 16 n. 3]). Other Islamic nativists believed that modern thought, such as democracy, agreed with Islam. In Iran, organizations such as The Freedom Movement and figures such as Mehdi Bazargan, the Islamic Republic's first prime minister (February 1979–November 1979), believed in modernizing Iran while keeping Islamic values, and advocated developing the liberal and democratic aspects of Islamic thought.⁴

Nationalism was also influential in Middle Eastern modern thought. Nationalists played an important role in the Arab countries seeking independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. Countries such as Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt tried to distance themselves from the Ottomans by emphasizing their Arab roots and the close relationship between Islam and Arabic culture and history. This sometimes allied the Islamists and nationalists, who were usually opposed to each other. Moreover, there were left and liberal inclinations among both the Islamists and nationalists. Among the most notable liberal nationalists was the National Front of Iran, founded by Mohammad Mossadegh, while the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria was an example of leftist-flavoured nationalism.

While modern art remained superficial in the first period, new attempts to engage modernism started in the Middle East after the Second World War. The artists of this period were not simply artists, but rather avant-garde intellectuals who saw themselves as social, cultural, and political commentators, playing an absolutely essential role in both artistic and socio-political modernization. The artist-intellectuals of this period also managed to create serious modernist art. Nima Yooshij revolutionized the long tradition of Persian poetry by writing in a new style, later known as *sher-e-no* ('The New Poetry'), and Sadeq Hedayat excelled in the modernist short story and fiction, genres that were new to Persian literature. Modernist experimentation with Arabic poetry started with figures such as Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, culminating in the Syrian modernist poet Adunis, and Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz was among the first Arab writers, along with Tawfiq el-Hakim, to attempt the new genres of novel and drama. Mahmoud Darwish gave modern Arabic poetry strong social and political dimensions, as he devoted a whole literary career to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Turkish literature also experienced radical changes after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and rise of the Republic of Turkey in 1922. Before that, and during the first period, Turkish

constitutionalists and nationalists, influenced by the Young Turks, had called for a literature that was free from the Perso-Arabic-dominated Ottoman literature. Nationalists also wanted a ‘national’ literature, and *millî edebiyât* (National Literature) soon replaced the long tradition of Ottoman literature. After 1922, in the era identified with Turkey’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, even more changes took place as writers of Republican Literature revolutionized Turkish literature. Nazim Hikmet, an economics and sociology student in post-revolutionary Moscow, studied modern Russian poetry and introduced free verse into Turkish literature.

Although Iranian, Arab, and Turkish intellectuals had not yet faced the philosophical principles of modernity, they could still relate to its European articulations at the level of art and literary imagination. If the first generation of Middle Eastern modernists imported these new genres along with their socio-political reforms, the modernist artists of the second period formed a deeper critical understanding of the new situation by seriously engaging with its literary and artistic aspects. Furthermore, Leftist movements and organizations became centres for dialogue and promotion of modern literary works, in turn consolidating these authors’ intellectual self-image. In Iran, many notable writers and poets of this period, such as Ahmad Shamlou and Gholam-Hossein Sa’edi, had Leftist inclinations, taking figures such as French intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre as role models.

The gradual settlement of the revolutionary drive in the final decades of the twentieth century and the failure of the Arab nationalist and Islamist programmes mark the beginning of the third period in the Middle East’s process of intellectual modernity. This period, which is still ongoing, is characterized by an attempt for a deeper critical engagement on the intellectual level and changes in the socio-political domain due to the appearance of a new world order. However, like the last two periods, fundamental problems are in the way of the Middle East’s modernization.

In line with global movements, in this period, development becomes a keyword for most Middle Eastern social and political leaders. Dispensing with their leftist inclinations, these leaders understand the urge to join the global community in economic development. This is inevitably accompanied by a turn toward the political right, and some of the ideological movements of the second period see the path to their development in having a relationship with the West. The intellectual support behind such inclinations has been figures with a combination of national and Western tendencies. In Egypt, President Sadat, once a follower of the leftist Gamal Abdel Nasser, radically changed when he decided to negotiate with Israel and open the doors to private investment through an economic programme called *Infitalah* (openness). In Turkey, the liberal market economy has been among the priorities of Islamic parties since the 2000s. Iran, transformed in the 1980s from the West’s ally under the progressive Shah to a revolutionary country at war, was the last to join the right-influenced campaign of development with a group of Western-educated technocrats in the 1990s.

In this period, the intellectuals’ critical analysis of their cultural, social, and political situation comes before their activism, a completely new phenomenon in the Middle East. Although the institutionalizing qualities of the development era turn intellectuals into academicians, the scope of modern thought expands in this period. While second-period intellectuals were mostly concerned with Marxist and anti-colonial thought, the academics of this late period have paid attention to fields as

diverse as sociology, political science, philosophy, and history. This was particularly influenced by the establishment of modern academic departments according to the model of Western universities. This last wave of intellectuals see the path toward change in analyzing their own societies through modern critical disciplines and by adopting a historical perspective towards their contemporary issues. In the Arab world, the likes of Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and Mohammed Arkoun (the Maghreb), Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (Syria), Nasr Abu Zayd (Egypt), and Hisham Sharabi (Palestine) are among those who have critiqued their historical, social, and political situations, using tools borrowed from Western philosophers, leftist sociologists, or postmodern thinkers. In Iran, Dariush Shayegan and Javad Tabatabai have tried to reach a deeper level in theorizing Iranian history and culture by maintaining a critical outlook – free from ideological, ethnic, or religious bias – on Iran’s intellectual and cultural heritage. Moreover, religious intellectuals, such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mojtabeh Shabestari, have tried to present updated interpretations of Islam in accordance with the modern world.

However, despite about 100 years of modern thought, the third period’s intellectual trends have not yet reached full development. Sharabi believes that the modern critical approaches, despite their engagement with fundamental issues, still have not reached the level of creativity, and the Arab world is still awaiting its ‘real’ modern philosopher, sociologist, or theoretist (1988: 120–1). The situation in Iran is similar. While modernist artists and writers have played an important role in forming Iranians’ historical self-consciousness, efforts in critical theory and academic social and political analysis have not kept the same pace and vigour. In general, critical thought in the Middle East is still in its infancy and has a long way to go, particularly because of the complications in the region’s troubled history.

THE SHOCK OF MODERNITY

The experience of modernity in the Middle East – both structurally and conceptually – is complicated and a source of confusion. The Middle East encountered European modernity at a time when Europe had realized an evolutionary path from the Renaissance. In the nineteenth century, the West had experienced the Enlightenment, and had even criticized it through the work of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche. The Middle East, on the other hand, was thrown into a developed experience of modernity while its nations were still struggling with issues like illiteracy, dictatorship, and underdevelopment. This disparity has made the Middle East’s transition to modernity extremely complicated and problematic.

The Middle East’s complicated experience of modernity can be traced in three main problems. The first is a state of oblivion and disconnection from its own history. The Middle East is the heir to some of the great civilizations of the past (Mesopotamia, Byzantine Empire, Persia, and Egypt), and the birthplace of Abrahamic religions. Islamic Civilization in its Golden Age, between the eighth and twelfth centuries, saw the appearance of great scholars such as Farabi, Al-Biruni, Alhazen, Avicenna, Averroes, and Ibn Arabi. Despite such a glorious background at the time of the European Middle Ages, the Middle East spent the centuries after the Western Renaissance in a state of intellectual stagnation. Encountering the modern world at the time of its decline, the Middle East faced many challenges in introducing modernity into its societies. Middle

Eastern thinkers' intellectual resources had lost their dynamism by the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries. The clergy dominated the cultural and intellectual domains, and they generally were suspicious of modernity, although their ideas in this regard varied. While some of the first-period reformers such as Tahtawi and Ayatollah Na'ini were religious figures, later, religious groups – whether radical Islamists (Sayyid Qutb, the Jihadists) or moderates (Turkey's Justice and Development Party and The Freedom Movement of Iran, both advocates of Islamic Liberalism and Modernism⁵) – became more conservative toward modernity.

The second problem is the rapid pace of events in the last century. In Iran, The Persian Constitutional Revolution, The Nationalization of Oil Movement, the 1979 Revolution, and the 1997 Reforms all happened in about 100 years. The same is true of Iraq, where independence from the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate and the Kingdom era, the Republic era with Saddam Hussein, the Iran–Iraq War, and the US invasion of 2003 all happened during the same time span. Lack of social and political stability, coupled with the repression of critique has hindered analysis of the situation. Philosophy and critical thinking are possible with freedom of thought and political stability provided by modern governments; with the social and political turmoil in the Middle East, there has been little room for the deep critical thinking that makes the transition into modernity possible.

The third problem facing modernization in the Middle East is Western colonialism. Europe was not under the dominance of other powers during its Renaissance and early modernity. The Middle East, on the other hand, was thrown into the experience of modernity under the constant presence and threat of superpowers: France, Italy, and Spain's presence in the Maghreb; Imperial Russia's interventions in the Ottoman Empire; and the British occupation of Egypt and their ongoing struggles with Russia over Persia and Central Asia, all consolidated the Western presence in a declining Middle East. Moreover, the state of Israel, located in the geographical Middle East, has worked as a proxy for the West in the last few decades, complicating the relationship between the Middle Eastern countries and the West. Between the struggles for independence from Western powers and increasing domestic social and economic problems, Middle Eastern politicians and intellectuals have been left with few resources to manage a smooth transition into modernity, and though many have remained true to their nations' interests, many others have quickly abandoned those interests under the influence of oil-driven politics. Sharabi (1988) explains how these tensions have eventually led Middle Eastern societies toward a state of neo-patriarchy, a situation whose instability erupted in the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011. When the shadow of war and insecurity is over the Middle Eastern nations, it is only natural that the intellectual and theoretical modernity becomes a problematic process.

A LONG WAY AHEAD

Even though the intellectual trends of modernity in the Middle East started their trajectories a long time ago, the region's eventful history and disturbed present have caused deviations in those trajectories, producing a radically different experience of modernity from that of Europe. The intellectual background of the Middle East has also played a role in these deviations, but political forces, particularly the rapid pace of events and European colonial projects, are the primary causes. Literary modernism,

on the other hand, has proven to be highly adaptable for Middle Eastern intellectuals. Perhaps in the long process of modernization still ahead in this part of the world, literature and the arts can play a positive role by continuing to pioneer change, exactly as they have done so for the last 100 years.

NOTES

1. Israel is not included, as most of its cultural, social, and political structures are more similar to those of the West, rather than the Middle East.
2. Iran was internationally known as Persia, until in 1935 Reza Shah asked foreign delegates to use the term 'Iran'. In the text, we have used the term 'Persia/Persian' whenever specifically referring to Iran before that date.
3. For the economic reasons behind the West's presence in the Middle East, see Hunter.
4. For more information on The Freedom Movement of Iran and Islamic Liberalism in Iran, see Taghavi.
5. For more on the Justice and Development Party and Islamic Liberalism in Turkey, see Axiarlis.

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CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

CINEMA AND MODERNITY IN
THE MIDDLE EAST

Post-colonial newness and realism

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Walid El Khachab

The historiography of Middle Eastern cinemas differs in at least one key way from its Western cousin. In the Middle East – mainly the Arab World, Iran, Turkey, and Israel – cinema as a practice has always been associated with modernity. The medium is viewed as part of the paradigm of the modern, regardless of the specific content of films. By contrast, in the West – particularly Europe – the *fortuna* of the labels *modern* or *modernist* in cinema is different. The early moving pictures from the nineteenth century in Europe and America were perceived as yet another instance of technological progress echoed in the realms of entertainment and art, and therefore modernist by default (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2007).

But Western cinematic practice was soon to be institutionalized and integrated in a larger history of the arts where different genres and eras bore diverse generic labels (Bordwell and Thompson 2010b). ‘Modern’ came to designate a specific genre of cinema, particularly around the 1920s and 1930s, which has equivalents in painting and sculpture. For example, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and *Un chien andalou* (1928) are visually associated respectively with abstract painting and surrealism, both of which are artistic currents subsumed under the label modernism in art history. Both films are sometimes labelled as representatives of modernism in cinema (Natter 1994). Apart from that instance, the adjective ‘modern’ is used in cinema in Western literature to suggest some kind of newness – usually in the sense of contemporariness – as in the phrase ‘modern Iranian cinema’, used in the 1980s to refer to post-revolutionary cinema in Iran. In the Middle East, the aesthetic and technical order of the modern is repeatedly associated with the labels ‘new’, as in ‘new Israeli cinema’, or ‘new realism’ in Egypt (Dabashi 2001; Shohat 2010; Farid 1992). Sometimes, the label ‘modern’ implies newness performed by contradicting older aesthetic values and generic conventions, and is often replaced by the label *new*, as in the Italian neorealismo or the French new wave (Bordwell and Thompson 2010a; Marcus 1986; Sellier 2008). This use of ‘modern’ is the one most often replicated in the literature on modern Middle Eastern cinema, by critics and historians from the West and the Middle East itself.

However, beyond ‘newness’, modernity is strikingly associated with the medium itself and is explained, advocated for, negotiated and/or conjured in the cinemas of

the Middle East. The conceptual triad of modernity/modernization/modernism remains a valid way to frame cultural production in its relation to time, particularly in the Middle East and, more specifically, in its cinemas. Modernity in this context can be conceived of as (a) an era; (b) a state of mind or a disposition to critique – even break with – tradition, or at least an older paradigm; (c) a social process; or (d) a conceptual constellation. Modernity will be addressed in the following within these four parameters: epochal modernity, whose starting point is usually considered to be the French Revolution, and which seems to be still ongoing; the conceptual constellation called ‘modern’, and organized around reason as a central subject; modernity as modernization: a series of rationalizing universal, social, and technological processes (including bureaucratic centralization, secularization, and capitalization); and lastly, modernity as an intellectual disposition to distance oneself from a certain tradition. Modernity is thus the constellation of values and ideas that break – in theory – with the Middle Ages around the principle of legitimization and evaluation of ‘truth’, whether based on church and religion or humanist philosophy. Modernization is the process of universalizing rationalization by creating institutions and implementing technology which are deemed modern, as in implementing universal suffrage or creating railways. Modernism, therefore, is reserved to describe a genre or series of generic characteristics in cultural production: visual arts, literature, theatre, etc. (Habermas 1987). Because it is part of the technological innovations of the nineteenth century, cinema as technology and industry illustrates the process of modernization as experienced at various speeds in Middle Eastern societies. Early twentieth century newspapers in the Middle East are quasi-unanimous in hailing the advent – rather the importation of – cinema into the region as yet another sign of the integration of the region into the ‘modern world’ (Hadary 1989; Maghazi 1975).

In terms of the debates it sparked because of its narrative content as well as the shift it introduced in culture, cinema was the primary locus of negotiation with modernity. It typically advocated modern ideas of secularism and of westernization, or created a space where the distress caused by the shift in value systems and symbolic references could be expressed and assuaged.

NAMING THE MODERN

A brief survey of the concepts used to express the idea of modernism in the Middle East strikes the observer by the diversity of Arabic words, none of which accurately translates ‘modernism’: *hadatha* (modernity), *moa’assara* (contemporariness), and *jadid* (new). The recurrence of these concepts in the course of Middle Eastern history is also striking. Every two decades or so a new trend, idea, current, or practice is labelled ‘new’ or ‘modern’ in many disciplines in the Western literature on the Middle East. Because of the scope of this chapter, I will focus mainly on this phenomenon in Middle Eastern cinema.

Hamid Naficy’s encyclopedia of Iranian cinema testifies to the modernizing role played by the moving pictures in the country since the inception of the project of westernization and secularization at the turn of the twentieth century, not unlike the experience of Arab societies. Hamid Dabashi, in his own historical account of Iranian cinema, insists on the epistemological agency of cinema as access to (conceptual) modernity that visualizes, and therefore historicizes, characters who otherwise may

acquire an eternal dimension, as in the written medium of the Muslim's holy book (Naficy 2011–12; Dabashi 2001).

The history of Iranian cinema offers, however, an interesting case study of the paradigm of newness as a conceptual attempt to define modernism in the seventh art. Often, historians of Iranian cinema identify some bold aesthetic experiments compared to or associated with neorealism and with European art cinema in the 1960s as 'Iranian new wave'. They also often refer to the cinema produced in the wake of the Islamic revolution in 1979 as 'modern Iranian cinema', but since then most agree with Naficy on using the label 'new Iranian cinema' to describe post-revolutionary Iranian film production (Tapper 2002; Chaudhuri 2005).

In both these examples, the adjective 'new' signals a break with a previous or a dominant aesthetic order. The late 1960s and 1970s Iranian new wave, sometimes referred to as *Motefavet*, departs from the predominant entertainment-based escapist musicals, comedies, and melodramas known as Film Farsi (Boughedir). Therefore, this trend is 'new' in the sense of breaking away from the commercial escapist cinematic rhetoric. It is also new inasmuch as it copies a European trend with no prior equivalent in Iranian cinema: in this case, Italian neorealism. For example, *The Cow* (1969, Iran) by Darius Mehrjui is one of the most critically acclaimed Iranian films from the pre-revolutionary era, and is almost unanimously labelled the flagship of Iranian new wave or new realism by Iranian and Western critics and historians (Jahed 2012; Sadr 2006; Tapper 2002).

However, a close examination of *The Cow* problematizes the characteristics associated with these labels, as defined in Europe. There is a vague correspondence between the film's theme and that of *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), the Italian neorealismo masterpiece by Vittorio De Sica: in both films, the poor man descends into despair then degradation after losing his livelihood (the cow in one case, the bicycle in the other). The unusually long shots (much longer than those in commercial films), the post-sync, and the depiction of rural poverty put *The Cow* in the neorealism category. But the film has a heavy expressionist component: the contrast between the play with light and darkness, as well as the establishing shots and long takes of the village line where the view is blocked by dark houses, are almost an allegory of the spectral nature of rural life, of the shadow of the past, or of tradition dominating the village society. The acting style, whose theatrics emphasize the madness of the peasant and his gradual transformation into his own cow, decisively underscore the expressionist nature of the film. It is precisely this combination, the insertion of the film in the world cinema paradigm because of its release at the Venice Film Festival, and its affinity with some European trends of art cinema, that constitute the newness of the film and the wave it started.

THESIS I: IN THE MIDDLE EAST, FOR MANY DECADES, MAKING MOVIES IN ITSELF MEANT PRACTICING MODERNITY.

If discussing modernism in the 'Western canon' of cinema makes sense, it is much less obviously so in the history of Middle Eastern cinemas. In the West, the labels 'modern' and 'modernism' may have been used to refer to alternative artistic cinematic productions in the 1920s and 1930s, describing films such as *Berlin: Symphony of a*

Great City, The Man with a Movie Camera, or Le sang du poète. There is no equivalent to such productions in Middle Eastern cinemas, certainly not in the 1920s and 1930s.

Michael Rowlands argues that in the Southern hemisphere, multiple temporalities often coexist – those of traditions and modernities – in the same national space. He thus underscores the desire of being modern in the historic experience of the twentieth century:

Defined as perhaps the key value of the historical experience of the twentieth century the desire to be modern became for much of the world an aspiration to achieve through emulation rather than the working out of an indigenous history. How to become modern and remain the same became more or less the equivalent of how to develop without becoming dependant.

(Rowlands 1995: 23)

This post-colonial understanding of the desire for modernity in the colonial and post-colonial realms applies accurately to the cinemas of the Middle East, particularly – but not exclusively – within the melodramatic mode. Melodrama in Middle Eastern cinemas in general has always been a privileged space for negotiating with modernity, where various discourses, ethical positions, and political attitudes about tradition and modernity confront one another, and where modern subjectivities are exposed to different modes of subjectivization or objectivization of the individual. Middle Eastern cinematic melodramas act essentially as agents of modernity, even if sometimes they attempt to conjure, neutralize, or render it inoffensive.

The literature on the role of cinema in promoting and at the same time conjuring modernity in the Middle East is not abundant. But a few scattered insights refer to this connection. Yves Thoraval laconically states that in Egypt, between the 1950s and the 1970s:

c'est plutôt la vie quotidienne, les mœurs d'une société (citadine) en mutation qui retiennent l'attention des réalisateurs de films: mœurs matrimoniales, relations entre jeunes et vieux, entre filles et garçons, entre riches et pauvres, tout cela dans une optique souvent moralisatrice et teintée d'un soi-disant traditionalisme islamique.

[rather, it is everyday life and the mores of an (urban) mutating society that capture the filmmakers' attention: matrimonial customs, the relations between youth and seniors, boys and girls, or rich and poor, all in an often moralizing perspective, with a hint of a so-called Islamic traditionalism] (my translation).

(Thoraval 1985: 234).

Thoraval argues that as of the mid twentieth century, Egyptian cinema was observing the rapid social changes resulting from urbanization, such as gender and class relations. He attributes the moral tone of the movies to a pseudo-Islamic traditionalism. I would frame this as cinema's attempt to dispel the distress caused by the challenge to the ethical order and the hierarchy of values within society that comes with modernization. In other words, cinema operates as an agent of modernity, by

promoting products and values associated with modernization, but cathartically, it simultaneously voices the concerns of traditionalist discourses.

Strangers (1972, Egypt) by Saad Arafa is an extreme example of the negotiation of modernity as a value system intertwined with modernization's bundle of rationalizing processes. *Strangers* approaches modernity in terms of a conflict between religiosity and atheism, which are clichéd, salient aspects of tradition and modernity, respectively. It does so through allegory; the film casts two of its roles as allegorical opposites: one, a character who represents the modernist, and the other a religious fundamentalist who 'refuses' modernity (El Khachab 2003). At the centre of the film is a young woman who hesitates between her loyalty to her atheist professor – a staunch preacher of a radical faith in scientific progress – and her close relation with her Islamist brother. She may be considered to be an allegory of Middle Eastern societies perplexed by the predicament of a choice between a modernity based on extreme westernization (associated here with atheism and scientism), and extreme conservation of tradition (associated with religiosity and righteous piety).

The film proposes a compromise between the two extremes, advocating that the middle ground is moderate, therefore safer. Throughout the film, the atheist professor suffers from spiritual and existential anguish, due to his loss of faith in meaning. In the end, he articulates this despair in a suicide note read in a voice-over. The Islamist brother is a victim of a different dilemma that plays out during the film; he believes in a fundamentalist interpretation of his faith, both austere and rigid, but is tortured by a sexual desire for his young neighbour. At the end, he experiences a breakdown after 'succumbing' to the temptress neighbour.

The last frames of the film follow the young woman reiterating in a monologue her perplexity and undecidedness between the two extremes: radical atheist modernity and radical religious revivalism. The film partakes of the allegorization of characters, particularly female ones (who often stand for the nation), which occurs frequently – or is perceived to occur frequently – in Third World cultures, particularly in Middle Eastern cinemas (Williams 2013; Baron 2005). Moreover, the voice-over heavily contributes to the production of the modern female subjectivity, thus illustrating Roy Armes and Lizbeth Malkmus' observation about the functions of voice-over in Arab cinemas. The authors argue that in these cinemas – particularly its melodramas – the voice-over expresses female feelings and desires (Armes and Malkmus 1991: 99–100). The debate over modernity in the film is not restricted to the semiotics of the narrative. It trickles down to the film's materiality at many levels, such as that of the image's 'feminization': the medium shot framing the conservative brother sobbing after losing his virginity is reminiscent of dozens of similar frames in Arab films where a young woman cries after her first intercourse outside of marriage. The 'modern' here is self-consciously produced through the reversal of gender roles, which challenges the patriarchal framing of the woman regretting her sexual transgression.

THESIS II: MODERNISM IS OFTEN A SYNONYM FOR REALISM IN MIDDLE EASTERN CINEMAS.

The underlying assumption here is that early films in the Middle East – even though part of modernization by the very fact of their existence – lacked a seminal dimension of modernity, namely the serious engagement with social and political issues. The

heroic age of Middle Eastern cinemas (roughly, the 1930s–1950s) is dominated by escapist pseudo-Hollywood aesthetics (Egyptian Lokoum movies, Iranian Film Farsi, Turkish Yesilcam). The common wisdom in the historiography of cinema in the Middle East is that the more emancipated from these aesthetics cinema becomes, the more realistic, i.e. modern, it tends to be.

However, an irony makes the case for this argument even stronger: the labels ‘new’, ‘new wave’, and ‘neorealist’ are far more widely used in the literature than the simple label ‘realism’ to depict an aesthetics that is assumed to break with non-realism or to construct a discourse on reality that critics accept as ‘realist’. I argue that this is due to the critics’ and theorists’ preoccupation with modernity subsumed under the notion of newness. In other words, the insertion of a film in the narrative of modernity as realism is better achieved when this modernity/realism is underscored as ‘new’, especially when the adjective ‘new’ implies – and at times explicitly refers to – aesthetic categories and generic labels that are Western, as in the case of ‘neorealist’ and ‘new wave’. This politics of naming includes Middle Eastern films in the Western narrative of the history of cinema as well as in the canon of Western aesthetics. The constant rewriting of post-colonial history in the Middle East results in the periodic ritual resurfacing of the concern with modernity, under the guise of the concept of newness.

The nature of this ‘politics of naming’ is exemplified by the problematic nature of any attempt to see commonalities between different Middle Eastern trends that are labelled neorealist. Iranian neorealism – within the Iranian new wave – is an eclectic blend of neorealism and expressionism, with a preponderant allegorical dimension. Egyptian cinema has known two major periods of neorealism in the 1960s and the 1980s. The first period was so labelled by film critic Guy Hennebelle, the second by film critic Samir Farid. The same school of the 1980s is simply labelled ‘new Egyptian cinema’ by Rafiq Saban (Hennebelle 1976; Farid 1992; Saban 2001).

It is fair to compare both Egyptian trends to realism inasmuch as they depict challenges experienced by the working class or marginalized populations and they do not indulge in escapist entertainment. However, these so-called neorealist films are far from any connection to expressionism, do not use post-syn, and always rely on mainstream movie stars. Furthermore, many of these films from the 1980s bear obvious affinities to Martin Scorsese’s urban realism. In other words, they depart from the assemblage that constitutes their Iranian counterparts and do not correspond in all points to the aesthetics of the European canon of neorealism.

Other Middle Eastern cinemas further problematize ‘newness’ by simply associating it with contemporariness. ‘New Turkish cinema’ is used by Asuman Suner and Gonul Donmez-Colin to refer to Turkish films that enjoyed a successful commercial release and generated millions in revenue. What seems to be the loosely common theme in that cinema is the quest for identity, a problem coextensive with modern Turkish society since its shift from an empire to a modern nation-state in 1923. It is unclear what exactly is new in this cinema other than its breaking with the aesthetics of the older entertainment cinema (Suner 2010; Donmez-Colin 2008). Nevertheless, as in the Iranian example, the cultural specificity of the cinema industry brings in an eclectic combination that does not conform to the Western canon and that is problematic when compared with other ‘new’ Middle Eastern cinemas. Donmez-Colin thus describes a landmark film of the New Turkish Cinema: ‘The originality of

Somersault in a Coffin lies in the manner it alternates neo-realism, science-fiction and fantasy' (Donmez-Colin 2008: 181). The film does not fit either in the Iranian trend or the Italian school previously alluded to, suggesting the difficulties inherent in both importing Western aesthetic terms to the Middle Eastern context and transferring them among Middle Eastern contexts as well.

It seems appropriate to conclude a brief discussion of 'newness' with the cinema of the newest state in the Middle East. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, cinema has been one of the major sites of the debate and the propaganda centred on modernity. The history of Israeli cinema is a dense version of Third World cinema's history, where the fascination, preoccupation with, and anxiety because of modernization gives way to the promotion of modernity, and then to questioning its premises.

A few years after the establishment of the state, and in tune with other cinemas in the Middle East, Israeli cinema engaged in negotiating modernity. Some of the first Israeli films dealt with the melodramatic tensions between modernity and tradition: the tension between the traditional religious neighbourhood and the secular open city, and the tension between Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. Cinema in Israel presents a special case in its relation to modernity's bundle of rationalizing processes: the major issue of modernization in Israel is that of the building of the modern state on the basis of the Zionist nationalist ideology. A major Israeli genre, Boureka films (melodramas and comedies) – which were criticized by Ella Shohat in her history of Israeli cinema – celebrate the modernity of Israeli society by casting the non-modern, backward Mizrahi (Arab Jew) as the Other, where the Self is the modern, civilized Ashkenazi (Western Jew) (Shohat 2010). The typical melodramatic plot evolves here around the mismatch between socially accomplished, educated, modern Ashkenazis and the uneducated, non-modern Mizrahis.

Only two decades after the inception of a national cinematic production, a trend in Israeli cinema emerged in the 1970s and was dubbed Israeli new wave, which makes it contemporary with other new waves in Egypt and Iran (Kronish 1996: 230–5). However, the Israeli version of new wave seems to be more in tune with European new wave aesthetics. This may be a confirmation of what I argued earlier about the rhetorical assimilation of the histories of Middle Eastern cinemas into a Western canon, or it may signal Israel's greater integration with Western culture than any other society in the Middle East. Nevertheless, its overarching themes and the place of 'newness' labels in the history of its cinema exemplify – as in the cases of Egypt, Iran, and Turkey – the centrality of the modernity paradigm in Middle Eastern cinemas.

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CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

MODERNISM AND DANCE IN
THE MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

Stavros Stavrou Karayanni

In 'Public Dancers', a widely cited chapter in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), Edward Lane records his observations of male and female public performers of Ottoman Egypt during the first half of the nineteenth century:

Egypt has long been celebrated for its public dancing-girls; the most famous of whom are of a distinct tribe, called 'Ghawázee'. A female of this tribe is called 'Gházeeyeh'; and a man, 'Gházee'; but the plural Ghawázee is generally understood as applying to the females. The misapplication of the appellation 'Al'mes' to the common dancing girls of this country has already been noticed.

(Lane 1966 [1836]: 384)

Intended to supply Western readers with a comprehensive account of private and public life in the Egypt of this period, *Manners and Customs* is a useful and apt starting point for an exploration of dance and modernity in the Middle East. Indeed, Lane's ethnographic information is detailed and engaging, yet there is also the fascination of many layers of performance that take place through this writing that concern dance as cultural and artistic practice in the colonial Orient. Attracting great and consistent attention since its publication, *Manners and Customs* is the Western reader's introduction to the famous, celebrated, and exotic dance figures of the Middle East. Their public performances as observed by Lane, but also a number of Western travellers since Lane, take place through the discursive frame of Western writing and are delivered to us as much more than just a cultural manifestation. These writers mobilized a trope of the Middle Eastern dancers and the East, more generally, as an imaginary site for their imposed fantasies (Said 1978). Desire and disapprobation, for example, are embedded in Lane's description of the dance movement and its historical associations:

The Ghawázee perform, unveiled, in the public streets, even to amuse the rabble. Their dancing has little of elegance; its chief peculiarity being a very rapid vibrating motion of the hips, from side to side. They commence with a degree of

decorum; but soon, by more animated looks, by a more rapid collision of their castanets of brass, and by increased energy in every motion, they exhibit a spectacle exactly agreeing with the descriptions which Martial and Juvenal have given of the performances of the female dancers of Gades.

(Lane 1966 [1836]: 384)

Apart from showing off his knowledge of Gades (a Phoenician colony and subsequently a Roman conquest) and Roman writers, and aligning himself with an ancient Western tradition of recording and interpreting foreign cultures, Lane also reiterates the romantic notion of the Orient as a seamless continuation with the distant past of Roman times and presenting it, in effect, as a rich kaleidoscope of primeval scenes unfolding before the European gaze. Moreover, his brief analysis of the dance in the passage quoted above soon turns into a strange but anticipated fusion of fascination and disdain:

I need scarcely add that these women are the most abandoned of the courtesans of Egypt. Many of them are extremely handsome; and most of them are richly dressed. Upon the whole, I think they are the finest women in Egypt.

(1966 [1836]: 386)

Lane is equally graphic but not as exuberant when informing his readers about the male public performers who, he tells us, are employed by many people in Cairo who do not object to the dance itself, but to ‘the fact of its being performed by females, who ought not thus to expose themselves’. Such people instead ‘employ men to dance in the same manner [...]. They are Muslims, and natives of Egypt’ (1966 [1836]: 389). In this way, the practice of male dancers seems to require some plausible social excuse: men perform in the place of women who should not be exposing themselves in public. Yet, the Western gaze simultaneously presents male public dancers as controversial and aberrant:

As they personate women, their dances are exactly of the same description as those of the Ghawázee; and are, in like manner, accompanied by the sounds of castanets: but, as if to prevent their being thought to be really females, their dress is suited to their unnatural profession; being partly male, and partly female: it chiefly consists of a tight vest, a girdle, and a kind of petticoat. [...] There is, in Cairo, another class of male dancers, young men and boys, whose performances, dress, and general appearance are almost exactly similar to those of the Khāwals; but who are distinguished by a different appellation, which is ‘Gink;’ a term that is Turkish, and has a vulgar signification which aptly expresses their character. They are generally Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and Turks.

(1966: 389)

Lane’s comments about male dancers, the *Khāwals* and their colleagues the *gink*, reveal his discomfort. The ‘unnatural profession’ suggests uneasiness and so does the effeminate dress on par with the permissiveness associated with the male performer custom. Moreover, these suggestions culminate in the lasciviousness of the *gink* insinuated by the ‘vulgar signification’, which points to the dancers’ explicit availability for sexual hire (Murray 1997: 46, n. 24).

Lane's account of public dancers in *Manners and Customs* sets the parameters for investigating and comprehending more than just the cultural location of public dances in the Middle East and North Africa. The people of Egypt as well as all the states of this geographical region have had a rich variety of dances (some of the most prominent will be outlined in the discussion that follows). Nevertheless, the *Ghawázee* and, to a lesser degree, the *Khäwals* have been the most popular. In the words of Magda Saleh, dance scholar and an authority on Egyptian folklore traditions, 'the dancing-girls of Egypt have attracted the most attention (admiring, incredulous, or censorious) and there exists far more reference to their art in the literature than all the other dance forms put together' (Saleh 1979: 133–4). I believe that further to the attention given by travellers and other interested parties, the *Ghawázee* have been researched and discussed because of the context created by their historical connection with contemporary belly dance. It is this connection that has made their public performances more explored and reimagined than any other dance of the colonial Orient. Furthermore, solo improvised public dances attracted so much attention and influenced so heavily the modernist imagination that any general definition of the region's native dances is heavily influenced by the choreographies and figures of public performers. In fact, the choice of dances to be included in this article has been determined to a large degree by their selective incorporation into modern belly dance technique or their prominent representation in Middle Eastern dance performances in countries readily associated with Western culture.

Of course, this process of incorporation has always been an important element of this hybrid dance's character both in its native environments as well as in its successful diasporic sojourns. And it becomes readily apparent that not only belly dance, but also its many relatives in the extended family of dances of the colonial Orient, balance themselves delicately and often anxiously between an indigenous rich economy of cultural investments on one side, and an inquisitive and prurient colonial gaze on the other. Thus, the dances of the Middle East and North Africa have always remained faithful to an intrinsic aesthetic that has been in continuous conversation with modernist transformations. Lane's comments about public dancers illustrate this precarious balance. In fact, *Manners and Customs* is an interesting and useful paradigm of the voyeuristic colonial gaze that wants to collect and re-present the Orient for a certain class of Western readers. As a result, Lane's treatise gives readers an opportunity to assess their own modernity and cultural legacies against the choreographic portrayal of an ambiguous terrain of exoticism and artistic possibilities.

Beyond Lane's interpretation, folk and urban dances from the Middle East and North Africa may be seen as fitting into three broad categories: community dances that observe social customs and often emphasize social bonding among community members; ritual dances that often have strong religious associations; and public dances, often solo and/or improvised, whose main purpose is to entertain while purveying various cultural traditions. I will comment briefly on some of the most prominent dances in each category, mindful of the fact that the continued performance and reception of these dances is often viewed through the lens of orientalism and colonialism. Intrinsic in colonialism is a complex system of ideological control instrumental in shaping artistic sensibility and playing an important role in the production and dissemination of art both in its native context as well as abroad. This

role is strongly apparent in belly dance whose international allure, popularity, and controversy emerge out of colonial strictures and ambivalent attitudes.

SOCIAL AND RITUAL DANCES

Western modernity commonly relies on artistic reinventions that are free from the fetters of the past. Middle Eastern social and ritual dances, however, reveal an approach to modernity characteristic of the region and nuanced in the sense that any radical cultural transformations attentive to Western modernity are also mindful of time-honoured traditions. Therefore, modernism has worked in tandem with a respected continuity so that cultural manifestations of the present observe the past (Armbrust 1996: 7); hence the strongly traditional associations of many dances of the Middle East.

The best-known example of a dance that pays attention to social customs and bonding among community members is the *debke*. Popular in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and with related forms in Turkey and Greece, the *debke* is a line dance where the dancers join hands and perform rigorous synchronized moves that involve swaying of the body and uniform footwork. The *debke* is energetic, exciting, and made even more so when the dancers – male and female – are dressed in colourful and elaborately embroidered costumes. In performance the *debke* shows off the camaraderie of a tightly knit community and rewards audience and performers alike with the vitality and hopeful idealism of group spirit. Often, the group is headed by a talented and experienced lead dancer, known as the *ras* (AlZayer 2004: 56–8). Ideally, in informal, traditional settings, the *ras* is particularly valued if he is also a senior and respected community member.

The *bagalla* is a lively and playful North African dance that is also social in character but more intricate and more socially nuanced than the *debke*. Traditionally, both men and women participate in the *bagalla* at events that represent cultural institutions of the community: weddings, for example (Saleh 1979: 43–58). As Andrea Deagon cogently assesses, in the *bagalla* the men's participation reflects male agency in a manner that makes the dance a 'microcosm of the public world' (1994). However, it is the female dancer who leads the dance and holds choreographic agency over the male dancers.

Ritual dances of North Africa and the Middle East include the Moroccan *guedra*, the *zar*, a ceremonial dance that seems to have its roots in ancient exorcism rituals, and the Sufi dervish whirling. Of these, the most popular and widely researched are the Sufi and the *zar*. The *zar*'s purpose is to heal an individual who is allegedly possessed by evil spirits. Popular all across North and East Africa and Yemen, this ritualistic dance straddles superstition and community values. The whole community becomes involved in the ritual, supporting their possessed member in an effort to disavow the evil spirit. And the entire process takes place through intricate rhythms that an often entirely female orchestra plays in rapid succession until the possessed finds her body and spirit resonating at the same pace and the riddance of the evil becomes possible through cathartic movement (Saleh 1979: 156–70). The most characteristic *zar* movement is the tossing of the head and hair from side to side and sometimes a complete rotation of the head.

Unlike the *zar*, the whirling dervish ritual attempts to reach an altered state of consciousness through ordered and disciplined movement whose ultimate purpose is

union with God. It is quite possible that spinning as the choreographic path to a mystical, inward journey pre-dated Mevlana Jalaleddin Rumi's order most often identified with whirling. Through a carefully structured ritual that includes prayer recitation (*zikr*), the dancers begin to spin in a counter-clockwise direction with open arms:

The palm of the right hand is turned upwards, the left hand down. This is a symbolic representation of the dervishes' role as intermediaries, receiving from the Divine Spirit with their upturned right hands, and dispensing to their followers with the down-turned left hands. Each dancer turns slowly on one heel at the same time as he moves with his fellows in a circle (or concentric circles) around the room in anti-clockwise direction.

(Al Faruqi 1976: 49)

Both the *zar* and the whirling dervish devotional dances, however, have been regarded with scepticism and sometimes even suspicion within Islamic societies. Apart from the reasoned explanations, rooted in interpretations of faith and divine worship, these dances are thought suspect because they open up a space of ecstasy, a mode of transcending the confines of familiar social and gender order through movement. Anthony Shay informs us that within a decade of the British takeover, Egyptians began to produce arguments against their cultural practices including the *zar*, and cites as a prominent example Mohammed Hilmi Zayn al-Din's 1903 book *Madar al-Zar/The Harmfulness of the Zar* (2002: 198). These dances, then, become instances where tradition, otherwise beloved and revered, is judged by the modernist gaze to be atavistic and backward.

PUBLIC DANCERS AND SOLO DANCE

The availability and promise of the *Ghawázee* and *Khäwals* are the very qualities identified with the East and paradoxically the qualities that engaged the Western imagination most strongly. The public dancer's rapidly vibrating hips (suggesting the shimmy that remains a powerful and basic articulation in the dance) engendered a complex matrix of responses whose import was that they motivated inspiration in fascinating ways. Two of the most famous and celebrated performers of nineteenth-century Egypt and, quite likely, the first modernist dance figures of the colonial Orient are Kuchuk Hanem and Hassan el Balbeissi who performed for the French writer Gustav Flaubert during his Oriental tour in 1850. Their performances for Flaubert (Kuchuk Hanem also performed for the American journalist George William Curtis in the same year) have been recorded by Flaubert who desired to articulate an Orient in a radically new literary discourse. Consciously, he distinguished himself from the Romantics and their attachment to the great civilizations of not only classical Greece and Rome, but ancient Egypt as well. In a gesture that revealed some of the conflicts and contradictory positions of modernism, he declared indifference to classical erudition and the wonder of ancient Egypt and sought, instead, Egypt's dancers, male and female, who embodied what the Empire found reprehensible and whose promise included a raw and intense fulfillment. Hanem and el Balbeissi offered him the perfect opportunity for Oriental spectacle as well as sexual fulfillment,

alluring him with the eroticism that Flaubert seemed to find implicit in the dance (Karayanni 2004: 46).

The Maghreb hung like lavish and exotic drapes across the landscapes of the European imagination. It was opulent, inviting, and replete with possibilities for aesthetes that included Oscar Wilde and André Gide, who travelled there just before Western Europe became lovesick with an Orient of erotic, exotic, and artistic potential. In fact, the aesthetic approach in their writings emulated the exotic idealism of decadence and contributed significantly to the colonial Orient becoming a source of endless fascination both as a geographical region and – more significantly – as an imaginary topos. Travellers to the Orient sought to collect experiences with dancers as cultural souvenirs whose materiality lay in the linguistic description of published or unpublished memoirs. The travellers' efforts were greatly encouraged by the sexual as well as artistic availability of many of the dancers. Colonial morality and legislation added great charge to this availability, making it attract attention and controversy.

But the *Ghawázee* and *Khāwals* were not the only dancers in the theatre of the alluring and aberrant Orient. The *Ouled Nail* people of the desert regions of Algeria produced beautiful and very attractive dancers who made their people famous. Prominent characteristics of *Ouled Nail* dances include outstanding muscular control, choreography that focuses purely on the body, and sumptuous jewellery and make-up. Young unveiled girls from this group would migrate to the cities and practice the profession of dancers and courtesans with the ultimate purpose of collecting the money that was necessary to marry well within their tribe. They eventually returned to their homes, married, and enjoyed a certain pride in having been professionals who secured a good living for their family with their earned savings (AlZayer 2004: 28).

Strongly reminiscent of the ancient practice of sacred prostitution widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean (perhaps related to the tradition of Indian *devadashis*), the *Ouled Nail* struck a certain tone in the modernist impulse. An interesting but also uncomfortable moment during the travels of the French writer Colette reveals the complex politics of Maghreb dancers and the Western subject's thirst for the dancer to provide the sexual as well as artistic experience made even more complex by the native wish to fulfill it. Yamina is an Algerian dancer who performs for Colette's entourage. However, the guide's prompting for the dancer to dance nude alters the dynamics of the exchange:

Like all the Ouled-Nail she danced using her arms and hands, flanks and the muscles of her energetic little belly. Then she stopped for a moment's rest, using the interval to undo the rose-bordered bodice, the wide-panelled skirt and the chemise of ordinary calico, for the guide insisted that she dance naked. Naked, she returned to the middle of the room between us and the two musicians, who had now turned their backs. The red of the fire and the sinister white of the acetylene flame disputed Yamina's youthful beauty, the slender beauty of a huntress, barely encumbered with breast or rump.

(Colette 1970: 81)

The guide's request for Yamina to perform naked might be a moment of autoexotica – an attempt to fulfill the tourist's expectation. It presumes that the Oriental subject has internalized the desire to present itself tamed and subjugated, either through

nudity or exhibition, and to surrender its choreography to the imperial subject, thus diminishing the efficacy of the moves and the sensibility that embodies them.

The American modern dancer Ted Shawn was another modernist figure who, like Colette, travelled to North Africa. Shawn was an ambitious and, in important ways, pioneering figure of modern dance, and his travels were motivated by a keen and genuine desire to learn about movement and folklore of different places. Being an orientalist, he espoused the very influential idea that the Orient can regenerate the West: a Romantic concept that saw interesting treatments in the cultural spaces of modernist metropolises. In the 1920s in Algiers, Shawn observes the performance of *Ouled Nail* dancers, and his response is conditioned by the manner in which he performed his masculinity, and more importantly, the frame through which he imagined it operated in relation to the colonial Orient and in association with his assumed notions of gender and movement, heterosexuality, and presumed racial superiority:

After several dances in costume, the dancers retired behind a screen, and then came out completely nude, except for headdress and jewelry, to perform the famous ‘Danse du Ventre’ or muscle dance, which is, in its way, remarkable. The control of the various muscles of the body is developed to an extreme degree. [...] It is not a ‘suggestive’ dance for the simple reason that it leaves nothing to the imagination, and because of this unabashed animality, revolts the average white tourist to the point of being unable to admire the phenomenal mastery which these women have of parts of the body over which we have no voluntary control at all.

(Shawn 1929: 182)

The unmitigated dichotomy between ‘the average white tourist’ and the *Ouled Nail* performers indicates quite clearly the hierarchical binary that to some degree affects all dances of the Middle East. The dance of the *Ouled Nail* violates the white man’s notions of bodily correctness. Being too crude and salacious for white sensibility, the dancers’ movements detract from their admirable isolation technique. Shawn’s reading of the dance helps in understanding how the modernist project was curtailed by hegemonic concerns and operations. He pursues and even teases his sensibility with the dancing body of the Orient but finds himself explaining it against his declared admiration.

BELLY DANCE

Interestingly, just before turn-of-the-century modernism exported itself to the East, the East was imported to the United States and Western Europe through the World Expositions. The Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and subsequent fairs in metropolitan European cities, marked the politics of oriental dance performance in a manner that may well have influenced its development in its native regions during the period most often associated with modernism. The presentation of native Middle Eastern culture at these fairs gave the opportunity to the middle classes of Western industrial modernity to observe a staging of native dances, and most notably the solo improvised ‘dans du ventre’ of the *Ouled Nail* that later became widely associated

with belly dancing. These performances were discussed, often criticized, and sometimes litigated, and the emergent discourse gradually established belly dance as the most representative and most easily recognizable dance idiom of the colonial Orient. Perhaps more than any other dance from North Africa or the Middle East, belly dance responded most strongly to the narrative of modernism in its discursive and artistic development.

The controversy and intrigue with which the dance was received in the West was transmitted to its native regions, again by travellers, but also by British soldiers stationed in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. Along with large numbers of locals, they frequented the clubs in Cairo and Alexandria; venues established in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s where this dance was performed for foreign and native audiences alike. Posters advertised 'Modern Belly Dance' as a focal attraction. (See, e.g., www.shira.net/about/ads-flyers/flyer-1930s-mary-mansour.htm.)

It was during these first few decades of the twentieth century that belly dance went through exciting developments and rebirths in the culturally prosperous Egypt of the 1920s. Karin van Nieuwkerk outlines the attraction of staged shows for working-class audiences, as well as the more affluent classes in Egypt (Nieuwkerk 1995: 24). While it is quite likely that for the local audiences the dance retained some of its folkloric associations, it was also undergoing radical transformations in terms of costume and style of performance. The cabaret version was in the process of being born and Badia Masabni, performer, artistic director, club manager, and dance activist, was one of the most fervent and capable midwives. By now a legend in Middle Eastern dance and culture, Masabni was a very dynamic figure, one of the first to train dancers formally and organize them into guilds. In its reinvention, this new and 'modern' belly dance was tinged with a certain glamour afforded not only by the colourful and now two-piece costume, but by a refined and carefully choreographed staging for discerning audiences. More importantly, the moves became more dramatic by using the balls of the feet to vary the range on the dancer's perpendicular axis (in folkloric versions the feet were mostly flat). Larger undulations gave the choreography a more lyrical character when performed on a stage. These interventions, which were familiar to all the countries of the colonial Orient, represented great potential for modernist expression while maintaining a strong connection with the *Ghawázee* tradition and their choreographies as described by Flaubert, among others. In other words, these staged renditions provided an opportunity to recast traditional, folkloric, and ritualistic elements through associations that were simultaneously modern and tradition-based.

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CHAPTER FIFTY

THE CRISIS OF THE PRESENT Literature in the Middle East and North Africa¹

—♦—
Anna Bernard

The question of what modernity is and how writers should respond to it has been central to literary debates in the Middle East and North Africa (comprising the Mashriq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Maghreb)² since at least the start of the nineteenth century.³ Any discussion of modernism in this context must engage the history of modern literary production across the region, which is closely tied to the history of European imperialism, the demand for political and cultural autonomy at the national and regional levels, and the critique of the new state regimes after independence. In Arabic literature, two recent periods foreground the idea of the modern: the *nahḍa* ('awakening' or 'renaissance'), most closely associated with literary production in Egypt and the Levant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and the 1950s–1980s, marked by the shift from a literature of political commitment (*iltizām*) to a literature of post-independence disillusionment, each characterized by new forms of experimentation and innovation. In this second period, the notion of modernism (*ḥadātha*) becomes most crucial to Arab writers' sense of their practice, especially in poetry, and in the major cultural centres of Cairo and Beirut. However, these specific post-colonial developments are also part of a longer engagement with the idea of literary modernity (again, *ḥadātha*), which has seemed especially urgent at particular historical junctures: during the late nineteenth century; after the First and Second World Wars; after the Israeli defeat of the Arab armies in 1967; and arguably, in the early twenty-first century, when the popular uprisings across the region seem to demand a new theorization of the relationship between literary and political action (El-Ariss 2013: 179–81). In what follows I emphasize poetry and the novel, which have been the dominant forms for modernist experimentation and position-taking, though related claims have also been made for the short story and drama.⁴ I also refer to parallel developments in two of the region's minor literary languages, French and Hebrew. This brief summary of a complex and contested literary history draws on the substantial body of English-language scholarship that seeks to account for it. Many of the literary texts mentioned are also available in English translation, giving readers without the region's languages significant resources for further reading.

Conventionally, the *nahḍa* in Arabic literature is said to begin with the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. Although the French occupation lasted only three years,

in the eyes of many *nahḍa* intellectuals it marked the end of a prolonged period of Arab cultural ‘stagnation’ or ‘decline’ during the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Under the Ottoman ruler Muhammad Ali, the Egyptian elite began to study European languages and to translate European texts into Arabic, as part of the effort to ‘modernize’ Egyptian society. Egyptian writers imitated and appropriated Western literary forms, especially in prose. Simultaneously, however, intellectuals in Egypt and elsewhere sought to revive an indigenous Arab-Islamic cultural heritage (*turāth*), drawing on the classical pre-Islamic and medieval Qur’anic literary traditions. The relative importance of these developments is still debated. Recent scholarship has challenged the notion of a period of post-classical stagnation as well as Europe’s influence in the *nahḍa* (Allen and Richards 2006; Rastegar 2007; El-Ariss 2013).⁶ There is evidence, for instance, that the simplification of classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) and the use of both *fuṣḥā* and the spoken regional vernaculars (*‘āmmiyya*) in literary texts, which are associated with the effort to modernize Arabic literature, began several centuries before the *nahḍa* (Tageldin 2012: 249; Allen 2007: 253). Rather than seeing the *nahḍa* as an embrace of European ‘modernity’ at the expense of Arab ‘tradition’, then, we might see it as a ‘fruitful meeting’ between indigenous and Western forms (Badawi 1992b: 1), through which writers attempted to create a distinctively modern Arabic literature. Equally important, however, is the significant break with indigenous prose traditions that the adoption of European genres represented, especially the rapid rise of the Arabic novel (Siddiq 2007: 25–6).

In prose, one of the major features of the *nahḍa* was the domestication of the ‘imported’ genres of the novel and the short story; another was the turn to mimesis, in place of ideal types (Badawi 1992b: 5, 16). Poetry of the period is divided into two phases, the neo-classical (mid-nineteenth century to the First World War) and the romantic (the interwar period). The former sought to modernize Arab classical poetic forms, while the latter’s anti-neoclassicism emphasized the imagination and non-conformism of the individual artist, though without major innovations in form (Starkey 2006: 42–78). Key figures of the Egyptian *nahḍa* include translator, writer, and educator Rifa’a Tahtawi (*An Imam in Paris*, 1834); literary critic and memoirist Taha Hussein (*The Days*, 1933); novelist and dramatist Tawfiq al-Hakim (*Return of the Spirit*, 1933); neo-classical poets Mahmud al-Barudi and Ahmed Shawqi; and members of the ‘Modern School’ (*al-madrasa al-ḥadītha*), including fiction writers Yahya Haqqi, Mahmud Tahir Lashin, and Mahmud Taymur. In their influential weekly journal *al-Fajr* (*The Dawn*, 1925–7), this last group sought to produce ‘an Egyptian literature, an Egyptian art, and an Egyptian thought’, demonstrating the close relationship between ideas of intellectual and national independence in the interwar period (Kendall 2013: 47).

The Egyptian *nahḍa* would be influential in subsequent articulations of literary modernity across the Arab world, but it was not a pan-Arab movement. In Lebanon and Syria, where the Catholic Church had been active since the sixteenth century, the predominantly Christian elite had a more ambivalent relationship to European and Arab-Islamic culture than their mainly Muslim counterparts in Egypt. Here, *nahḍa* intellectuals emphasized the need for Arabic to express contemporary reality (Starkey 2006: 30–4). An important early figure is Ahmad Faris Shidyaq (Lebanon), whose satirical semi-autobiographical travel narrative *Leg Over Leg* (1855) recounts the picaresque adventures of the author’s alter ego ‘Faryāq’. Shidyaq’s narrative

announces itself as modern in its linguistic innovation, mixing of genres, use of metafictional devices, and foregrounding of individual subjectivity, which it also undermines and mocks (Rastegar 2007: 101–25). Because there is relatively little evidence of literary experimentation in the Maghreb, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula during this period, these areas are generally excluded from standard histories of the *nahḍa*, although writing influenced by developments in Egypt and the Levant emerged in the 1930s (Starkey 2006: 36–7).

Hebrew literary modernism at this time was primarily located in the urban centres of eastern and central Europe, especially Odessa, Vienna, and Berlin. However, Jewish migration to Palestine since the 1880s meant that some of the key figures of Hebrew modernism were active in the region from the 1910s onward, most notably the novelist Yosef Haim Brenner (*From Here and There*, 1911) and the poet Avraham Shlonsky, who was a member of an influential group known as the *Moderna*. Interestingly, these writers shared some concerns and attitudes with their Egyptian and Levantine counterparts. They also sought to create a national literature in a modern idiom that would be formally and stylistically distinctive. They drew on European modernist innovations, including expressionism and symbolism, but saw them as a means of asserting Jewish cultural autonomy in Palestine and breaking definitively from Jewish existence in Europe.⁷

The second phase of *ḥadātha* in Arabic literature begins after the Second World War. This period saw many momentous political events, including the establishment of the Israeli state and the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) in 1948; the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, ending the 70-year British occupation; the spreading of pan-Arab nationalism under the Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1956–70); the Algerian war of independence (1954–62); and the Arab defeat in June 1967. While Cairo and Beirut remained at the centre of Arab cultural production, the pursuit of an Arab literary modernity became a common enterprise, with important novelists and poets emerging from various countries throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The best-known writer of the period is the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz – *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956–7), *Children of the Alley* (1959), *Miramar* (1967), and *The Harafish* (1977) – who remains the only Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (1988), although many of his contemporaries and successors have also become internationally known. Among Anglophone readers, this is largely thanks to the American University in Cairo Press' English translations of Arabic fiction since the 1970s, and the English-language anthologies edited by Palestinian-Jordanian poet and critic Salma Khadra Jayyusi (1989, 1991, 1992a, and 2008, amongst others).

There are many accounts of what *ḥadātha* means in prose during this period, but in poetry, the term *al-shīr al-ḥadīth* (modern or modernist poetry) describes the free verse movement (*al-shīr al-ḥurr*) from the late 1940s–1960s. Poets associated with this movement abandoned the Arabic metric and rhyme schemes that had been retained by the neo-classical and romantic poets. Instead, they wrote poems with lines of irregular length, varying numbers of metrical feet, and varying rhyme schemes or no rhyme scheme. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (Iraq) and Nazik al-Mala'ika (Iraq) are often described as the pioneers of free verse, but Adonis (Syria), Yusuf al-Khal (Lebanon), Khalil al-Hawi (Lebanon), Tawfiq Sayigh (Palestine), Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (Iraq), and Salah Abd al-Sabur (Egypt) became equally well-known, thanks in part to Adonis and al-Khal's Beirut-based journal *Shīr* (*Poetry*, 1957–64, 1967–9).

A number of these poets took inspiration from Anglo-American modernism, particularly T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land': they used mythic and folkloric allusion, mythic time, urban settings, and the figure of the poet as an outsider, with points of literary and historical reference relevant to Arab readers (Jayyusi 1992b: 148–56).⁸ Of this group, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber) is now most closely associated with the idea of *ḥadātha*, which he defined as an entirely new 'way of seeing' (Adonis 2003: 79). Arab modernism, Adonis argued, could not simply revive traditional Arab forms nor imitate Western poetic techniques:

[it] must be seen in the context of Arab creativity and judged by standards of artistic innovation particular to Arabic [...] For an Arab poet to be truly modern his writing must glow like a flame which rises from the fire of the ancient, but at the same time is inherently new.

(Adonis 2003: 100–1)

This notion of literary modernity is evident in Adonis' first major collection, *Songs of Mihyar of Damascus* (1961), where he adopts the persona of the medieval Persian poet Mihyar al-Daylami, reinventing him as a transcendental figure who is identified with Adam, Ulysses, and Orpheus, and with the free rein of the imagination (Adonis 2010: xvi–ii; Musawi 2006: 99).

The free verse movement was contemporaneous with the era of *iltizām*, a translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *engagement* (political commitment), which was embraced by a younger generation of writers opposed to the aestheticist stance of older writers like Taha Hussein (Starkey 2006: 126). A number of free verse poets, particularly al-Bayati, documented social inequality in their work, consistent with the social realism that dominated Arabic fiction until the 1960s. Poetry's ability to reach a wider audience than fiction made it an important medium of protest and social change. The popular Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani's later work is a good example, as is Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's early work. Palestinian resistance poetry (*shī'r al-muqāwama*) became popular across the Arab world after 1967, when the West Bank and Gaza came under Israeli occupation. Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, Tawfiq Zayyad, and Fadwa Tuqan are amongst the more prominent Palestinian poets emerging at this time, although Darwish later distanced himself from some of his more explicitly defiant poems, such as the iconic 'Identity Card' (1964).⁹

Arabic fiction of this period was similarly distinguished by its formal and political subversions. In Egypt, the most innovative writers are known as the Sixties Generation (*jīl al-sittīnāt*), including Sonallah Ibrahim (*That Smell*, 1966); Gamal al-Ghitani (*Zayni Barakat*, 1970); Edwar al-Kharrat (*Rama and the Dragon*, 1979); and Bahaa Taher (*Al-Khutūba*, 1972; *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*, 1991). Al-Kharrat described the group as contributing to a 'new sensibility' (*al-hassāsiyya al-jadīda*): they were disillusioned with the Nasser regime after the defeat of 1967, but they continued to believe in art's capacity to bring about a better future, as conveyed by the forward-looking title of their journal, *Gallery 68* (1968–71) (Kendall 2003: 40, 46). These writers rejected the realism of earlier modern Arabic fiction, working instead in a self-consciously fragmented, multi-voiced, and anti-realist (or, in the case of Ibrahim, hyper-realist) mode. This shift away from mimesis also appears in Mahfouz's later novels, and in writers' work beyond Egypt, including that of Emil

Habibi (Palestine/Israel, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, 1974); Ghassan Kanafani (Palestine, *Men in the Sun*, 1963); Sahar Khalifeh (Palestine, *Wild Thorns*, 1976); Elias Khoury (Lebanon, *Little Mountain*, 1977); Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Palestine/Iraq, *In Search of Walid Masoud*, 1978); Abd al-Rahman Munif (Jordan/Saudi Arabia, *Cities of Salt*, 1984–9); Tayeb Salih (Sudan, *Season of Migration to the North*, 1966); and Hanan al-Shaykh (Lebanon, *The Story of Zahra*, 1980).¹⁰

These novelists departed from their predecessors in their use of polyphony (including the use of multiple narrators, interior monologue, and shifting points of view); multiple genres and styles (including reportage, framing narratives, epistolary form, and pastiche); disjunctive chronologies and settings; and magical realism and myth (Meyer 2001: 15–70; Musawi 2003: 117–62). Far from simply recycling strategies associated with Euro-American modernism and postmodernism, these writers' innovations responded to a specific context of political and social crisis (*azma*), in the wake of the defeats of 1948 and 1967 and in opposition to the increasingly authoritarian governance of the post-independence regimes. These texts are 'modernist' because they formally and generically reflect a disjuncture between the pre-colonial past and post-colonial modernity, as in the literature of other formerly colonized regions (Lazarus 2012: 237–41). While this might also be said of some of the literature of the *nahḍa*, this period of Arab modernism represents modernity not as a future state to be aspired to or rejected, but as an unavoidable crisis of the present (Makdisi 1995: 98, 104–5). The correspondence between formal and socio-historical rupture manifests in Kanafani's abrupt shifts between Palestinian migrant labourers' flashbacks and their doomed journey in the present; in Salih's disorienting juxtapositions of near-contemporaneous events in London and rural Sudan; and in Khoury's repetitions of the same passage at intervals throughout a fighter's chaotic account of the start of the Lebanese civil war. All of these strategies draw readers' attention to the laborious attempt to impose narrative order on an incoherent present.

The formal enactment of an ongoing crisis also appears in Maghrebi literature of this period, in both French and Arabic. Arabophone writers from the region include Moroccan novelist and autobiographer Mohamed Choukri (*For Bread Alone*, 1973), Algerian novelist Tahar Ouetar (*The Earthquake*, 1974), and the extraordinarily prolific Libyan Tuareg writer Ibrahim al-Koni (*Gold Dust*, 1990; *The Animists*, 1991).¹¹ Yet much of the best-known Maghrebi literature is written in French, even decades after decolonization. Writers such as Rachid Boujedra (Algeria, *The Repudiation*, 1969);¹² Tahar Ben Jelloun (Morocco, *The Sand Child*, 1985); Mohammed Dib (Algeria, *La grande maison*, 1952); Tahar Djaout (Algeria, *The Last Summer of Reason*, 1999); Assia Djebar (Algeria, *Fantasia*, 1985); and Kateb Yacine (Algeria, *Nedjma*, 1956) have achieved canonical status in French literature, partly because they seem to reflect the Maghrebi experience of the wars of liberation and their aftermath, but also because their work represents some of the most formally and linguistically innovative Francophone writing since 1945. Like other Arab writers, they seek to reclaim and reconfigure a national history, territory, and community through literary experimentation (Bensmaïa 2003: 6–8). Djebar, for example, draws on multiple genres including historiography, travel writing, autobiography, and oral narrative to recover Berber culture and the excluded voices of Algerian women. There is also a minor tradition of Lebanese and Egyptian writing

in French, including Egyptian novelist Albert Cossery (*Men God Forgot*, 1940); Egyptian poets Joyce Mansour (*Cris*, 1953) and Edmond Jabès (*The Book of Questions*, 1963–73); and Lebanese novelists Andrée Chedid (*From Sleep Unbound*, 1952) and Amin Maalouf (*Samarkand*, 1988).

The second phase of Hebrew modernism is identified with the State Generation (*dor ha-medina*), the generation of Israelis who came of age after 1948. In poetry, the figure most commonly associated with this period is Natan Zach, who in 1966 wrote a manifesto declaring his generation's opposition to the poetic practices of the *Moderna*. Zach claimed that his contemporaries sought to avoid the previous generation's excessive figurative language and elevated rhetorical style. Instead, they used freer rhythms, irregular rhymes, and a conversational register (Gluzman 2003: 137–40), again recalling contemporaneous trends in modernist Arabic poetry. In Hebrew fiction, this period sees the emergence of two of the best internationally known Hebrew-language writers: Amos Oz (*Where the Jackals Howl*, 1965) and A.B. Yehoshua (*Facing the Forests*, 1968). Oz and Yehoshua's early work is modernist in its techniques (interior monologue and stream of consciousness, narrative disjunction, inconclusive endings), and in its challenge to pre-state Hebrew writing depicting Jewish national identity as eternal and innate. Instead, their work vividly demonstrates that Israeli identity is formed in relation to the dispossessed Palestinian other (Hever 2001: 159).

While Hebrew literary culture has remained largely separate from the literature of the rest of the region, there are points of contact in the emergence of Mizrahi¹³ writers since the 1950s (Sami Michael, Shimon Ballas), as well as Palestinian Israeli citizens writing in Hebrew (Anton Shammas, Sayed Kashua). Another point of convergence is that increasingly for writers across the Middle East and North Africa, the West no longer equates with modernity (El-Ariss 2013: 179). Today's Arabic, Hebrew, and French-language writers continue to build upon and react against the innovations of their predecessors, in an effort to find more precise ways to represent the challenges and possibilities of the present.

NOTES

1. This essay uses the IJMES system of transliteration for words in Arabic and Hebrew. However, proper names are given in the form normally used in English transliteration: thus, Naguib Mahfouz rather than Najīb Maḥfūz. Literary titles use the wording of published English translations (where available), but give the date of publication in the original language.
2. The Maghreb (meaning 'West') corresponds to the North African countries west of Egypt (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania), while the Mashriq (meaning 'East') corresponds to Egypt and the countries east of Egypt and north of the Arabian Peninsula: Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.
3. Some scholars place the advent of the modern much earlier. Nadia al-Bagdadi (2008: 442, 453) observes that the poets of the Abbasid period (AD 750–1258) described themselves as 'modernists' (*muḥdathūn*). The Syrian poet Adonis locates poetic modernity in the cultural resistance to the Islamic caliphates in the eighth to tenth centuries (2003: 75–7). In the *nahḍa*, he says, 'the question of modernity was revived' (77).
4. On the development of the modern Arabic short story, see Hafez 1992a, 1992b, and Kendall 2013. On modern Arabic drama, see Badawi 1992a and Al-Ra'i 1992.

5. In his *Arab Literary History* (1910–13), the Lebanese writer Jurji Zaydan named the Ottoman period the ‘Age of Decline’ (*aṣr al-inḥiṭāt*), an idea which dominated much subsequent *naḥḍa* scholarship (Al-Bagdadi 2008: 444–6; Sheehi 2012: 270 n.2).
6. See Sheehi 2012: 269–70 n.1 for a comprehensive list of revisionist scholarship on the *naḥḍa*.
7. On this period of Hebrew modernism in Palestine and in Europe, see Gluzman 2003, Pinsker 2010, and Schacter 2011; on Brenner and Shlonsky, see Alter 1988, Gluzman 2003, and Pinsker 2010.
8. For summaries of the history of the free verse movement, see Jayyusi 1992b and Starkey 2006: 79–96. For a fuller treatment, see Musawi 2006.
9. On the modern history of political engagement in Arabic poetry, see Alshaer 2014.
10. For fuller accounts of the major novelists of this generation, see Mehrez 2005, Musawi 2003, and Siddiq 2007. Wen-Chin Ouyang (2012 and 2013) places this work in conversation with the work of some of the major poets, including Adonis, Darwish, and Qabbani.
11. Instead of writing novels of urban crisis, Al-Koni describes himself as a founder of a ‘culture of the desert novel, which is something as new to the world as it is to Arabic literature’ (qtd. in Elmarsafy 2012: 108).
12. Boujedra began to write in Arabic not long after *The Repudiation* was published in 1969.
13. The term ‘Mizrahi’ (literally, ‘eastern’) refers to Israeli Jews originating from the Middle East and North Africa.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

MODERNIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION IN EASTERN MUSIC

—♦—
*Amnon Shiloah*¹

In *The Western Impact on World Music*, Bruno Nettl states that in the Middle East, 'the traditional musical system shows evidence of both modernization and Westernization. The social contexts of music, concepts and behaviour patterns, while bending, have not broken' (1985: 20). Nettl deals then with the concept of centrality, which means 'in a musical style, one or several features are more central than others and function as hallmarks' (20). However, Nettl argues 'the issue of Modernization versus Westernization is complicated by the need to determine the relative centrality of various components of the music system' (156). I had the opportunity to tackle this issue in my elaboration of the Great Musical Tradition after the advent of Islam, which I dealt with in my book *Music in the World of Islam* (Shiloah 1995: 19–20). It constitutes the skilful fusion of selected elements from previous great traditions of the conquered peoples with elements from the Arab tradition, which resulted in successful 'new arrangements'. These new arrangements were considered by both conquerors and conquered as outgrowths of the old as well as representative of orthogenesis. The latter notion is drawn from von Grunebaum's dichotomy of orthogenesis versus heterogenesis in relation to the change of Muslim culture (von Grunebaum 1956: 95–6).²

Against this background I can argue that modernization should not be considered as an 'original', 'authentic', and static tradition, nor should all the novelties introduced under the impact of Western music be viewed as unwelcomed alterations devoid of authenticity. Rather, manifold permutations characterized music in the past, and a wide variety of stylistic types and changes emerged under the impact of new conditions.

EARLY CONTACTS BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND EUROPEAN CULTURE

The treaties of 1543 between France and the Ottoman Empire inaugurated an age of cultural interaction that was particularly fruitful for music: to celebrate the treaties, French king François I sent Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent an orchestra as a sign of friendship. The French embassy in Constantinople became an attractive

centre for scientists and artists who were invited to record their observations on various aspects of culture. Two hundred years later, Augustus II of Poland was presented with a Janissary band (*Mehter*) by the Sultan. The *Mehter's* music caused a sensation. It was soon identified with Turkish music as a whole (*musica alla turca*), and was very much in vogue in the eighteenth century. By contrast, Western music affected Turkish diplomats rather differently. According to B. Lewis, 'the earlier travelers to Europe make very few references to any music they might have heard' (Lewis 1982: 262). Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub, speaking of Schleswig, notes that: 'I have never heard worse singing than that of the people of Schleswig. It is a humming that comes out of their throats, like the barking of dogs' (qtd. in Lewis 1982: 262). Likewise, the Ottoman envoy Vasif, in Spain in 1780, wrote: 'All the great men, by order of the king, invited us to meals, and we suffered the tedium of their kind of music' (qtd. in Lewis 1982: 273).

Despite this inauspicious beginning, growing receptivity to European influence in various cultural spheres gradually meant that Western music acquired prominence in Ottoman performance and education. Some young Turks were sent abroad to study Western classical music, among other topics. One Turkish pianist, upon his return home from Paris, was invited by the Sultan to give a recital in the court. He performed Beethoven's works before a high-ranking audience at court, an event of such significance that it was reported in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in June 1889.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

One of the most notable, organized, and official movements for musical change, the *Tanzimat*,³ arose in the Ottoman Empire in the early 1800s. The *Tanzimat* reforms, which moved in the direction of modernization, were opposed by traditionalists who argued that the reformists were destroying the Empire's fundamental Islamic character. Sultan Selim III, who ruled from 1789–1807, is thought to have been the originator of modern reform in the Ottoman Empire, paving the way for musical modernization as well. In modernizing his armed forces, Selim replaced the famous elite corps of Janissaries. The *Mehter*, which played traditional reed pipes, trumpets, cymbals, and kettledrums, was later replaced in 1826 by Selim's cousin Mahmud II in an official shift towards Western music. In 1827, the Serasker, or military commander, Mehmed Hosrev Pacha, asked the Sardinian Minister in Istanbul to help him obtain a number of musical instruments of the kind used in Sardinian army bands. He also asked for the loan of a bandmaster to train a group of musicians. Agreement was reached between the Ottoman and Sardinian authorities and, in due course, Giuseppe Donizetti (brother to the composer Gaetano Donizetti) was sent to Istanbul where he conducted the imperial band and was later placed in charge of the Imperial Ottoman School of Music.

Sultan Abdul Aziz, sovereign from 1861 to his death in 1876, was the last Sultan to be a musician. He favoured developing Western music, which had remained the privilege of high society. Hybrid combinations of traditional Turkish music with Western music characterized even the music composed by the Sultan and reflected the changes taking place in the traditional art music of the Ottoman Empire's regional cultures.

WHAT CHANGES APPEARED IN IRAN

The long traditions of Iranian (or Persian) music were first significantly modernized under the dynasty of the Qajar at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Frequently underwritten by state patronage, classical Iranian music is referred to in various ways: *musiqi-ye asil* (noble music), the music of the *radif* (the repertory of traditional melodies), or simply *dastghah* music. It is characterized by simple instrumentation, the use of poetry, cloistered performance spaces, and oral transmission rather than written scores. It is often played either by a solo instrumentalist or, more typically, by an ensemble consisting of vocalist, instrumentalist, and drummer. There is an intimate bond between sophisticated musical forms and poetry, such that Persians consider music incomplete if poetry is missing. In its most authentic form, classical Iranian music is played in private homes and in the meeting places of certain Dervish orders (Zonis 1973: 2–3). E. Zonis continues:

[M]any of those musicians belonged to a class of professional amateurs; this class emerged and probably became increasingly important as a result of religious disapprobation of art music that hampered official sponsorship and encouragement.

(1973: 14)

The second half of the nineteenth century brought significant changes to this situation. From 1850 on, Western music was formally introduced into Persia, bringing with it numerous innovations that affected Persian music: orchestral arrangements, large musical ensembles, music without lyrics, and relatively stable written scores. Zonis suggests that

the change of this situation is in the number of modernized items as well as the transcription of the *radif* repertory in Western staff notation that opposed the important characteristic of the classical music – describing the performance of the *radif* as being improvised.

(1973: 3)

Zonis notes further that

the most impressive of the Qajar monarchs Nasser ad-Din Shah (1848–96) imported a French music master in 1858 to train his *corps de musique*. The third Frenchman to hold this position, Alfred J.B. Lemaire, who stayed in Iran over 40 years, founded a school of music that became important for the training of military band players and music administrators.

(1973: 39)

Despite these efforts, Western music's impact on Persian production and performance has been relatively subdued. Virtually no radical westernization occurred, and there was certainly no total changeover. The major effect is apparent in the search for valid syntheses destined to ensure the coexistence of the new features inspired by models of Western music in parallel with the traditional ones.

This synthetic effect manifests in the complex and crucial trend today of westernized traditional Persian music. As Zonis explains:

This occurs in two degrees: gross alterations that produce new hybrid music, and fine modifications in which the texture and character of the Persian music are not radically changed [...] The most traditional music is, by and large, not being used to create new hybrid forms [...] The changes in the *radif* are not radical [...] they do not constitute a threat to the continuation of traditional Persian music.

(1973: 193, 197).

Instead, a new form has emerged in parallel to the traditional classic music: Iranian popular music. According to Zonis, this music

reflects numerous foreign influences not only from Western, but also from Arabic, Turkish and Indian musics. The major form of Iranian popular music is the ballad or *tasnif*, whose sources date back to pre-Islamic times. The modern *tasnif* may be considered part of the art music of Iran, since they were composed in one of the *dastgha-ha* and are close to the melodies of the *dastgha*.

(1973: 10)

EGYPT UNDER THE RULE OF MUHAMMAD 'ALI PASHA (1805–48)

An Albanian officer in the Ottoman forces trying to dislodge the Napoleonic army from Egypt, subsequently named governor of the province by the Sultan, and ultimately founder of both modern Egypt and a dynasty that ruled from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, Muhammad 'Ali played a critical role in establishing modern Egyptian music. He enthusiastically supported westernized reform in Egypt, and in the early nineteenth century introduced the formal teaching of Western music to Egypt by founding five schools of Western military music staffed by European musicians, primarily Italians (al-Hifni 1969: 71). Muhammad 'Ali's fourth son, Sa'id, succeeded him and in 1856 granted Count Ferdinand Lesseps the concession to build the Suez Canal (opened 17 November 1869). As part of the festivities, a new opera house, the Khedivial Opera House, was inaugurated in Cairo. Two years later it hosted the first performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aïda*, commissioned by Isma'il Pasha, Khedive of Egypt. This was the first opera ever performed in the region. It was a landmark event that set the precedent for other meetings between East and West in music in major centres such as Uzbekistan and other Islamic states in the former Soviet Union. Another premiere launched in the Khedivial Opera House was Dahud Husni's *Samson and Delilah* in Arabic. In this new Arabian art form, Husni blended stylistic elements and characteristics of Persian and Turkish *maqams* with Western operatic conventions to produce a thoroughly modern fusion.

INNOVATION IN EGYPT

One of the chief drivers of musical innovation in Egypt in the early twentieth century was the introduction of phonographic records. As 'Ali Jihad Racy has noted, Egyptians were quick to adopt phonographic recordings of their favourite musicians, and helped drive the technology's spread to other Arab countries (Racy 1976: 25). Among the European record companies initially involved in Egypt were Gramophone, Odeon, and Baidaphone. Soon, however, local Egyptians began producing hundreds of records of different sizes that helped meet the massive demand for music by Egyptian music stars (1976: 30). As cinema grew in popularity in the 1930s and 1940s, bringing with it the extremely popular genre of the song film, phonograph records only became even more popular. In the 1970s, the cheaper and more convenient cassette tape effectively replaced the commercial record as a medium for the transmission. The recording industry, first European-based then domestic, and song films, constitute some of the most powerfully determinant factors in the processes of change in Egyptian modern music.

Also in the 1930s, as song films were making inroads into Egyptian music, the scholar Curt Sachs was invited by the Egyptian government as counsellor to help suggest appropriate ways to modernize traditional art music. In addition to consulting, Sachs was one of several notable Western musicologists invited to take part in the important Cairo Congress of Arab music held in Cairo in 1932. Sachs led the conference commission on instruments that discussed the increasing adoption of non-Arab instruments. On the agenda of the concluding session was the hot topic of the use of the quarter-tone piano in oriental music. All the European participants voted against this innovation while the great specialist of Arab music, H.G. Famer, joined the Egyptian hosts in voting in favour of its use because he assumed that the quarter-tone piano would safeguard the scale and the modes (*maqamat*) from change.

Salwa el-Shawan has documented how some of these changes also influenced the nature of musical ensembles in Egypt in the twentieth century. She notes in particular the significant changes that took place as a result of the development of a new type of performing ensemble much different in size, structure, and concept from the traditional chamber ensemble of the traditional *takht*:

During the late 1920s and early 1930s *takht* ensembles were modeled on their nineteenth and early twentieth century antecedents [...] The components of the *takht* consisted of a man or female vocalist, accompanied by a small instrumental ensemble [...] up to the *takht* leader.

(El-Shawan 1980: 143–4)

The new ensemble, called *firqah* (literary group), was a large assemblage of traditional and Western instruments such as the accordion, cello, saxophone, guitar, clarinet, double bass, and occasionally quarter-tone piano. In some *firqah* conductors assume leadership. These innovations helped drive the emergence of urban secular music, known as *al-musiqa al-'arabiyya* (Arabic music), particularly in Cairo from 1927 to 1977. As el-Shawan documents, *al-musiqa al-'arabiyya* takes on a specifically modernist flavour in some of its sub-categories: *al-Turath* (heritage) - *qadim* (old) vs.

al-jadid (new). The latter means ‘a style deliberately and consciously open to non-traditional influences, including musical styles and techniques outside the sphere of Arabic music altogether’ (El-Shawan 1980: 51–2).

NORTH AFRICA (THE MAGHRIB)

The hybrid Andalusian *nuba*, evolved over eight centuries of Muslim domination in the Iberian peninsula, was decisive for Maghreban art music, eventually coming to be considered by its practitioners as its hallmark. The Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula from 711–1492 CE enabled a fascinating example of cultural interchange. Over that time, the compound form of the Andalusian *nuba* combined with another Andalusian novelty, the strophic poetic genre (or *muwashshah*) to produce what E.G. Gomez has called ‘the most original product of the Umayyad culture’ (1976: 229). In this hybrid form the fundamental unit is the strophe, or *nuba*. Spanish Muslim musicians used a system of 24 *nubat* said to correspond to 24 modal scales and to possess a range of cosmological affinities.

With the fall of the last Muslim stronghold in 1492, the sophisticated compound form of the *nuba* was transferred with the Muslim exiles who took refuge in the *Maghrib* countries (e.g. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya). The Andalusian *nuba* achieved great prestige among the people of the *Maghrib*, who perpetuated certain local Spanish styles and schools even as they made it their own: the number of the *nubat* was reduced to between 11 and 13, and the local sequences and their forms were perpetuated under different names: *as-san’a*, *‘ala*, *gharnati*, *ma’luf*, and *musiqā Andalusia*. Frequently, in addition to these particular appellations the general generic term Andalusian music is added, perhaps to extol the prestigious origin of the genre.

Though the primary agents of developing the Andalusian *nuba* in the *Maghrib* were proponents of urban art music, the *nuba* also owes its preservation to religious movements and mystical Muslim brotherhoods. Similarly, Jewish communities in North Africa adopted the model of the *nuba* for *Baqqashot*, or supplications: post-midnight ceremonial singing on Friday nights in winter.

Though overshadowed by its integration into the Andalusian hybrid *nuba*, the *muwashshah* persisted as an independent form. N.E. Currey notes the Syrian *muwashshah* that has gained considerable esteem: ‘The repertoire of *Muwashshahat* (plur. of *muwashshah*) has been embraced and showcased by the government as a symbol or emblem of national and cultural identity’, and is considered to represent the classical style (2002: 11). The Syrian *muwashshah* deviates substantially from the version preserved in the Andalusian *nuba*.

In addition to the influential and sophisticated *nuba*, and the stubborn *muwashshah*, light popular music that combines the classical tradition with Bedouin and folk music, and borrows from the new Egyptian style (*sharqi*, or oriental), has grown up as an important part of *Maghribian* musical modernism. In Tunisia the advent of the new musical style is closely related to the reform in the theatre and the Egyptian reform in music. A case in point is the great actress Habiba Msika, a celebrated singer, who used to travel to Cairo in search of innovations.

THE ISLAMIC LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

An inescapable problem for music in the Arab world and Middle East, regardless of its classicism or modernity, is whether it is in fact permissible according to Islamic law to play or listen to it. The issue is centuries old, and continues to fire debate between conservatives such as the Qa'ida and Salafite movements and the more progressive Muslims. The conservative radicals insist that listening to music is a satanic delusion made to divert the believer from his religious duties. Progressives, in turn, defend the cause of music as a celebration of God. In this vein, one of the most influential living leaders is Sheikh Yusuf al-Karadawi, who has published several books of responses to major questions and problems inherent to contemporary innovations. In his decisions he usually reviews his predecessors' comments and the sources on which their arguments are based. He frequently refers to the Andalusian poet, historian, jurist, and philosopher Ibn Hazm, whose eleventh-century *Tract on Recreational Music* concludes with the following advice: 'If the purpose of man in using music is to find recreation to his soul and fortify it to cope with God's obedience, he is not in error' (Hazm 2003: 100–1). Inspired by this idea, al-Karadawi adopted an approach giving when possible preference to the principle of lawfulness over prohibition, providing a good purpose is intended. In another context, he compared modern media to a sword:

When it is in the hands of the defenders it would be considered as an instrument used in the holy war, but if it is in the hands of brigands it is an instrument used for sinful purpose. Hence a thing always represents the function of its use and the purpose toward which it aspires.

(al-Karadawi 2001: 735–26)

CONCLUSIONS

As is often the case when the modern asserts itself by breaking dramatically with tradition (however tradition is defined), there are losses as well as gains. The modernization of Arab and Middle Eastern music from as early as 1492, but primarily in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, generated both tremendous innovation and significant loss. Generally speaking, across the region, the modernization of music has brought many changes.

First among these is that the introduction of symphonic arrangements, large orchestras, and stages for performing reduced the intimacy of the small performing groups, the interaction between a solo vocalist and the instrumentalists, and the relationship between the performer and a small knowledgeable audience. More instruments and performers also meant more Western instruments and new techniques, further diluting the traditional experience. The necessity of playing together in large ensembles shifted the accent from the display of individual virtuosity and personal creativity to collective discipline, and led to a growing emphasis on rhythmic and metrical pieces instead of improvisational and non-metrical ones. A perfect musician in classical music was described as combining the talents of composer and performer; sometimes he was also endowed with a poetic gift. In the modernist vein, these roles are disaggregated and assigned to specialized performers.

These changes in performance led to the introduction of a compulsory time limit on programmes in concerts on radio, television, and records. An important aspect of traditional music's improvisational nature had been the musicians' freedom regarding tempo and duration. Performance length was the function of the musician's technique and creative capacity, his feelings at the moment of the performance, and/or the favourable reaction of his auditors and their encouragement. Thus the performer, thanks to the continuous interplay between him and a limited intimate audience, was encouraged to improvise. Ironically, where jazz introduced many of these elements into Western art music, they were lost in the modernization of Arab and Middle Eastern art music.

These changes extend as well to the mode of instruction. Traditional music was orally transmitted, learned directly from distinguished masters and not provided by institutions as a formal education. The emergence of educational institutions subverted this apprenticeship model, and supplemented the oral, personal learning environment with notated scores of traditional or hybrid music. This shift further cramped the improvisational and personalized dimension of traditional music by fixing the compositions in given forms.

Finally, the recourse to electronic means for amplification led to the appearance of a new type of vocalist who no longer relied upon the volume of his natural voice and its multiple nuances for his performance. Along with recording technologies, these material shifts in how music was performed and transmitted depersonalized the experience and robbed the music of (the appearance of) authentic presence and intimacy. In becoming more modern(ist), Arab and Middle Eastern music became less personal but also less exclusive. It could more easily be enjoyed by those without the privilege of attending live performances, but at the cost of the loss of what Walter Benjamin called its aura (1968). The result is a music that is innovative, syncretic, and constantly changing but that continuously sounds a loss of tradition at the same time as it announces its futurity.

NOTES

1. Professor Shiloah passed away before he could ratify our final editorial changes to his chapter. We have proceeded to publish the chapter with his family's consent.
2. Orthogenesis in this context refers to change that emerges intrinsically from cultural change within Muslim communities, while heterogenesis refers to change initiated by extrinsic influences.
3. *Tanzimat* means 'ordering' or 'regulating'. It is used in modern Turkish to mean 'reforms'.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

ARAB THEATRE BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY



Dina Amin

Debates among Arab intellectuals over the notions of *asala* (tradition) and *hadatha* (modernity) manifest in modern Arab history in four stages or junctures in history: mid nineteenth century; early twentieth century; 1950s–1960s; and post-1967. This chapter focuses on the last two of these; a chapter of this length could not responsibly sum up all arguments around the field of modernism and Arab literary output across 22 countries extending from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. I thus begin with a disclaimer: even though the region as a whole shares common geographical, cultural, social, religious, and political grounds, it is by no means a monolithic entity. Each Arab country encompasses its own local colour of culture, dialect(s) and historical specificities. This chapter attempts only to map out the chart of modernity and modernism on the Arab stage in *very general terms* while narrowing discussion to the three important decades pertaining to modernism: 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The first part of this chapter outlines the major debates around the topic of modernity, and the second part surveys modernism and the Arab stage during the second half of the twentieth century.

The initial aspect to be discussed within the rubric of Arab theatre is the independence of indigenous Arab performance arts prior to the advent of Western colonialism in the nineteenth century. Until that juncture, Arab performances included a wide range of arts: storytelling, puppet theatre, shadow plays, dramatic street performances, al-Samir (evening gatherings comprising of many performances from standup comics to dancing and singing), circus skits, maqama (one-man shows with rhyme), and poetry recitations. All of these took place outdoors (except shadow plays, which required specific place, time and text), and are not text-based as they depended largely on improvisation and drawing from stock characters and ancient archetypes. Many early European travellers wrote about those performances in more-or-less pejorative terms as they compared them to Western dramatic arts; a good example of this attitude pervades Edward Lane's famous book *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1908). This Orientalist attitude legitimized colonialism by way of representing Western culture as superior to Arab culture. Thus, an important step towards national cultural modernism in the mid twentieth century was to correct the Orientalist account by resurrecting performance traditions

to connect with the past and underscore Arab cultural identity. Identifying the special qualities of 'Arabness' and asserting that Arab cultural identity was distinct from Western tradition were important steps towards constructing modern, post-colonial, liberated Arab nation-states. This euphoria peaked in the 1960s in Egypt under the aegis of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (also pronounced Jamal 'Abd-al Nasir), who was an ardent proponent of pan-Arabism.

Pan-Arabism was in fact the most important cultural and political element in the twentieth-century Arab world, and can be construed as its primary form of modernism. Indeed, pan-Arabism propelled Arab intellectualism consciously to re-connect with the cultural past to establish a continuity with authentic identity. Therefore, intellectuals adhered to a 'united' Arab tradition and cultural heritage as a form of resistance to and independence from both Western hegemony and Israel's occupation of Palestine. Thus, *fusha* (classical and standard Arabic language) became a vital vehicle for the arts as it has always been one of the major elements uniting Arabs. As the language of the *Qur'an*, it is also an important signifier of the importance of 'Arabness' for Islam itself. Consequently, the majority of dramatic texts produced throughout the 1950s and 1960s were written in classical Arabic. Transcending local dialects and communicating in standard Arabic facilitated the dissemination of performance arts across the entire region. Furthermore, the rebirth of Arab mythology, history, and folklore on stage consolidated the modern identity of 'Arabness' in the Arab world, frequently at the cost of representing other local ancient cultural influences such as the Pharaonic, Phoenician, or Berber. This form of post-colonial modernism was, however, shattered when Egypt lost the war against Israel in 1967. This moment in modern Arab history was a breaking-point; Arab identity experienced a crisis, which some have described as the worst thus far.

Al-Naksa (the defeat) resulted in a wholesale reevaluation of Arab values as intellectuals asked a number of essential questions: what is the identity of Arab culture and intellectualism? Which parts of Arab culture and arts were *asil* (authentic) and which were *gharib* (foreign) and imported? What is the relationship of Arab intellectuals and Arab heritage? And how can the Arabo-Islamic heritage (*turath*) provide lessons for the present? In short, Arab intellectuals started to question the whole concept of Arab modernity as it had been formulated from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century.

The 1950s and 1960s were informed by, but not identical to, earlier notions of Arab modernism. Roughly speaking, nineteenth-century modernity entailed a discussion of Western influences on Arab culture and history, while the first half of twentieth-century debates on modernity and modernism emerged as a search for the true Arab cultural identity to resist Western colonial hegemony. In the second half of the century, the discussion of Arab cultural modernism was intertwined with notions of political pan-Arabism as a form of independence from any residue of Western colonialism.

A number of conferences in Kuwait and Cairo around the topic of modernism in the post-1967 period determined that Arab modernity had subscribed to a faulty Western division of its own history. The concept that Arab culture had experienced some 500 years of cultural wasteland (before the advent of Western colonialism) led to a disconnection between modern Arabs and their cultural heritage. This period-division of a 'dark age' and an 'age of enlightenment' initiated by colonial presence

only benefited Orientalists' view of Arab history and ignored five centuries of creative output. This paradigm was not refuted by the early twentieth-century modernists, but after the military setback of 1967 it was repudiated by Arab thinkers. According to Moroccan 'Abdallah Laroui, Arab modernity until the 1970s was derivative, lazy, unearned, and essentially faulty; it had to be challenged (1976: 8–9). Such a view marks a key turning-point that inaugurated Arab theatre, literature, and culture as we know them today. The remedial step was to admit defeat, recognize misconceptions of cultural heritage, and examine the true trajectory of Arab intellectual history.

Having provided a very general overview of the important debates that emerged over the nature of Arab modernism and its relationship to tradition, I now discuss the development of modern Arab theatre as a result of its encounter with European theatrical trends, and how that fusion brought about, propelled, and challenged the modern Arab stage. While Arab intellectuals have been heavily involved with disagreements over the notion of authenticity and modernity, from the early nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, Arab playwrights had until the present day the added struggle of introducing, producing and disseminating European-style theatre to an audience that was not used to sitting silently in the dark to watch a scripted play with a curtain between them and the actors.

The earliest 'modernists' in Arab theatre, in the sense of introducing a new performance style, are Marun al-Naqqash in Lebanon and Ya'qub Sannu' in Egypt. Both had the privileges of travelling to Europe and speaking a number of languages. Both were proficient in Italian and French, which is of the utmost importance apropos the new performance art that they introduced to their fellow countrymen and women, since they depended heavily on 'Arabizing' French and Italian plays. In 1847 Al-Naqqash built a stage in his backyard and produced the first modern Arab play, *al-Bakhil* (*The Miser*), which was an adaptation of the French play *L'Avare*. He added music and dance segments to most of his productions to make performances more entertaining for his contemporaries who were not used to pure drama. Al-Naqqash referred to his work as 'foreign gold cast in an Arab mould' (Rubin 1999: 236). He also adapted tales from *A Thousand and One Nights* to the stage (see Rubin 1999).

In 1870 in Egypt, Ya'qub Sannu' built the first playhouse in the Arab world under the auspices of Khedive Isma'il. Sannu' became playwright, director, and producer of that European-style theatre and in a span of three years managed to mount over 70 plays. Among his many contributions to Arab theatre was the introduction of women to the stage. Sannu' also translated many French plays into Arabic, which led the Khedive to dub him 'the Arab Moliere' (Amin 2010: 288). Ironically, Sannu's theatre was closed down in 1873 by royal order as the British, who were in the process of colonizing Egypt, deemed some of his productions to be subversive.

Al-Naqqash and Sannu's contributions to the Arab stage are enormous as they bridged Arab performance arts towards modernizing and updating old dramatic forms from their archetypal models and traditional forms. They introduced a new approach that required new rules and skills of composition and a number of new elements: text, stage, erection of a fourth wall, women on stage, creation of the position of stage director, fixed performance schedule, as well as the construction of buildings to encompass those new trends. All those elements are considered 'modern', for until that historical moment dramatic performances in the Arab world had no text but depended on improvisation; did not include women in the dramatic skits as

boys played their roles; were not performed in a theatre space as troupes were street players moving from one densely populated area to another; and lacked directors as dramatic events were based on collective effort. In relative terms, these new criteria represent the modern form of theatrical performances introduced to nineteenth-century audiences.

The early twentieth century witnessed a wave of translations and adaptations of European plays in Egypt. For decades the Egyptian stage continued to be the central influence of various cultural activities in the Arab World for geopolitical, educational, and social reasons, the most important being that it was the first Arab country to go through a major project of modernization under the auspices of Khedive Muhammad 'Ali Pasha (1769–1849). That renaissance made Egypt the centre of arts and culture for decades. Until the 1930s stage productions did not require accurate or top-quality translations as they were not expected to be read; translations of European plays were often corrupted, changed, and modified to suit the talents of lead actors, and to satisfy the entertainment needs of spectators. However, when the National Theatre was inaugurated in Egypt in 1935, there was a demand for refined translations of international classics and for original Arabic plays that contributed to modernist dramatic literature. For drama to be admitted into the canon of Arabic literature, it had to be written in classical Arabic, address the mind, and follow intellectual theories and trends. Tawfiq al-Hakim, who took on that task single-handedly, is arguably the most important figure in early modernist Arab theatre. After studying in France for a number of years, he returned to Egypt determined to create a body of dramatic works that benefited both literature and the stage. His play *Ahl al-Kahf* (*Sleepers of the Cave*, 1934) was the first Arabic play to be mounted on the Egyptian National Theatre and was praised by many critics as a true contribution to high culture. Thereafter, al-Hakim continued to write for the stage what he called 'plays of the mind', which were to be read not staged (Badawi 1987). As part of early twentieth-century debates over modernity and modernism, al-Hakim dramatized Arab, Islamic, and Greek history and mythology to comment on his contemporary world. For instance, he used the Biblical and Qur'anic story 'Sleepers of the Cave' to convey to his contemporaries that the Arab World had been in a slumber under the yoke of colonial powers and must wake up to catch up with the modern world.

After the 1952 Egyptian Revolution changed the monarchic system to a republic, and in the aftermath of the liberation of many Arab states from European colonialism, an era of optimism led Arab intellectuals to unite and outline a modern Arab identity free from Western hegemony. Young playwrights used the stage to reflect independence, resistance against Israel, and establishment of a new Arab nationalism. During that decade, Tawfiq al-Hakim abandoned his intellectual dramas and started writing plays in colloquial Egyptian to establish a non-elitist form of theatre. He called his productions of the time 'plays with social intent', as he directed his attention away from mythology and history to current issues and policies (Badawi 1987). During this period, the discourse of modernism started to focus on everything Arab to establish a connection between the newly liberated consciousness and its traditional roots, thus forming a continuity with the past which had been disrupted by the presence of colonizing forces.

In theatre, dramatists and theatre-makers denounced the fact that European style-theatre had become the standard, and classical Arab performances extinct and remote

in the memory of creators and audiences of theatrical performances. Thus, many took it upon themselves to reconstruct traditional art forms and dramatic practices. This endeavour continued well into the 1960s, the golden age of Arab theatre, when Arab playwrights resurrected the discussions pertaining to tradition and modernity for the second time in the twentieth century. The 1960s debate was similar in its fundamental questions to earlier debates on modernity, but this time in the context of independence and the rise of new nation-states, and in contrast to the prior colonial context.

By the early 1960s, a number of voices among Arab dramatists started calling for the return of authentic Arab theatre and a reconnection with the past. Bringing the past into the present not only represented continuity with the prime of Arabo-Islamic political and cultural past, but also revived the spirit of unity between the Arab nations which had been united under Islamic rule (from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods until the Ottoman), and which had been broken up by Western colonialism. As a political stance, this solidarity was important if the Arab world was to rally its spirit and its armed forces against one enemy: the Israeli state built on Palestinian land. Thus, the search for authentic roots in cultural, social, and political aspects became important pillars in the construction of the modern Arab nation-state in the 1960s.

As discussed above, the most important component of unity among Arabs is the Arabic language itself. Therefore, in the 1960s many Arab playwrights opted to write their plays in standard Arabic, as opposed to local dialects, in order to be appreciated by all Arab audiences around the region. While the debate on whether to use the colloquial or standard Arabic on stage started at the turn of the nineteenth century for cultural reasons, and was at that time settled in favour of classical Arabic for inclusion in the literary canon, in the 1960s that debate was reversed for political reasons: Arab nationalism. The leading playwrights in that scope are Tawfiq al-Hakim, Alfred Farag, Salah 'Abd al-Sabur, Sa'dallah Wannus, Mahmud Diab, 'Ali Ahmad Bakathir, and 'Abdel Rahman el-Sharqawi. Another common practice among these dramatists is the use of Arab historical, religious, folkloric, and mythological heritage. Three of them argued that Arab theatre had always had its specificity and originality, and that it was imperative to revive that spirit; Yusuf Idris and Tawfiq al-Hakim in Egypt, and Sa'dallah Wannus in Syria, presented their theories about the quintessential Arab dramatic performances, and asserted that in order to create a 'modern' Arab stage, old traditions must be revitalized.

In *Nahw Masrah Misri (Towards an Egyptian Theatre, 1964)* Yusuf Idris argues that colonialism corrupted Egyptians' viewing practices and turned audiences into passive spectators. He discusses al-Samir, which was common across the country, as the prototypical Egyptian performance model. He explains that al-Samir performances were nightly entertainments that included music, dance, storytelling, comedic skits, reenactments of important everyday life stories, and improvised (impromptu) acting scenes. Idris stresses that in the pre-modern period spectators in Egypt were active participants in all of those performances: they sang and danced along, they partook in comedic reenactments to spoof figures of authority, and they took control of the unfolding of street theatre by playing certain parts and/or performing specific preferred stock characters or familiar plots. Spectators were as much centre stage as the performers. Idris calls on Egyptian theatre-makers and audiences to bring back

that celebratory spirit. Furthermore, Idris labels pre-modern Egyptian performance spaces as democratized since they placed performers and spectators on the same plane, as opposed to Western theatre that divides them and imposes silence and darkness on audiences (Idris 1988: 5–62).

In *Qalibuna al-Masrahi* (*Our Dramatic Form*, 1967), Tawfiq al-Hakim argues that the indigenous Egypto-Arab dramatic performances were essentially narratological rather than mimetic, meaning that they depended on storytelling rather than pretending to play a part. He thus urges theatre artists to adapt international theatrical plots to the Arab stage by converting dramatic texts to stories that can be partially narrated and partially acted out. That way, al-Hakim asserts, international classics can be easily disseminated to provinces in a form that is accessible and recognizable.

In a long introduction to his play *Mughamarat Ra's al-Mamluk Jabir* (*Adventures of the Head of Jabir the Mamluk*, 1970), Syrian playwright Sa'd Allah Wannus presented his view of the essence of Arab theatre. According to Wannus, Arab dramatic performances are rooted in political debate. He coined the term 'theatre of politicization' in describing pre-modern Arab performers who, according to him, constantly engaged their audiences in political arguments and conversations at cafés and during evening village soirées. Wannus maintains that this is the ideal way for political reform to set in, as it provides a forum for the masses to express their political views freely under the banner of performance. Therefore, after the Arab defeat of 1967, he utilized this form in *Haflat Samar min ajl Khamsah Hoziran* (*Soiree for the Fifth of June*, 1968) to engage the audience in a debate about reasons for the defeat (Allen 1984: 94–113).

The above theories were put forth to bring about a form of modernism that was intrinsically Arab and completely independent from Western tradition. However, after the defeat in the 1967 War, Arab nations went through a serious stage of re-evaluation. Arab cultural identity, notions of modernism, and Arab nationalism were put to question. As a result, many Arab intellectuals and artists stopped producing, while others wrote what they called 'literature of defeat'.

After a period of silence, a number of Arab authors reemerged with texts that utilized Arab history, tradition, mythology, and indigenous narrative styles to comment on and critique the post-1967 Arab world. This time their attitude in reviving tradition was totally different from pre-1967 cultural upheaval. It was not an aesthetic revival, but a dialectical relationship with the past, whereby both past and present are interrogated, evaluated, and critiqued. A number of Arab playwrights continued to bring the past into the present but with a different focus. While this intellectual trend is more apparent in the novel and short story, it appears on the Arab stage in different manifestations. The most evident of these is the use of the Arabic language itself. Playwrights around the Arab World started to abandon the use of classical Arabic and veered toward the use of local dialects on stage. Those new trends and attitudes reflected localism, regionalism, and compartmentalization within the Arab intellectual (and political) bloc. Once regionalism became the preferred model, local dialects and colloquialisms (previously deemed beneath the dignity of Arabic literature and symbolic of Arab disunity) came to symbolize the particularity and specificity of individual states, and pan-Arabism became a topic of derision and ridicule. A good example of this is a play entitled *Bi-l 'Arabi al-Fahsih*

(*In Plain Arabic*, 1993–4) by Egyptian playwright Lenin el Ramly. This play critiques Arab unity in the post-1967 era within a comedic context; it resonated well around the region and was in production for many months.

The rise of the female voice is among the major trends in the post-1967 period and continues strongly today. While Arab women had been writing and publishing (not to mention performing and producing) for the past 100 years, the difference in the post-1967 period is that during this period their writing reached the maturity level of their male counterparts, indeed on many occasions exceeding it. Amongst the many strong female stage voices are Fathiyyah el-'Assal, Nawal al-Sa'daawi, and Nehad Gad. As evident in their writing, the three embody three models of modern feminist: el-'Assal is a socialist feminist who advocates social justice for both men and women and holds capitalism responsible for all social injustices; al-Sa'daawi is a radical feminist believing that 'man' and patriarchies are behind all evil; Gad, who died young, was a moderate feminist who saw that men and women can and need to be reformed to accommodate each other. Presently, the contributions of women to the Arab stage extend to every aspect: from acting, directing, and writing to producing and management (see Selaiha 1993).

Arab modernists believed in the importance of cultural continuity and bringing the past into the present. While this task had different objectives at different historical moments, the principle was always the same: connecting the modern self with its ancient roots.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

MODERNISM AND THE VISUAL ARTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

—♦—
Nada Shabout

Modernism in the non-Western post-colonial world has been often characterized as a dilemma: an imposed Eurocentric mode of being that is generally very selective in its applications by the imperialist colonial powers, that at once excludes and renders the non-West as belated and needy as modernism equally imprisons the non-West in an incessant cycle of rejection while it tries to belong. Thus, despite the transnational evolution of modern art – of which the modernists themselves were aware – non-Western canonical history still emphasizes the centrality of Western art, which in turn became synonymous with universal art against which all other art productions are measured.¹

How to escape a reductive, suppressive reading of global forms of knowledge? How to untranslate the 'Other', which has not only been repeatedly translated for us, but also packaged? How could we articulate modern art outside of Europe within a discipline that is itself a European construction? Scholars have begun to address these questions. A number of historians of the non-West have called for moving new readings of the modern away from Europe as the source of 'real' knowledge. Aamir Mufti, however, points out that we (scholars of the modern non-West) are all Eurocentric in our comparative methodologies that inevitably privilege Europe as its referent for stylistic and period categories. Mufti nevertheless does not advocate abolishing the comparatist approach, but rather is concerned with the disciplinary conditions in comparative studies.² Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan points out the need for intellectual autonomy: 'Unless and until other worlds are recognized not merely as *other histories* but as *other knowledges*,' inequity will remain (Radhakrishnan 2003: 58).

In explaining the imperialist approach to modernity, Timothy Mitchell does not deny its claims of 'impossible' universalism. On the contrary, he explains:

One of the main characteristics of modernity has always been its autocentric picture of itself as the expression of a universal certainty, whether the certainty of human reason freed from the particular traditions, or of technological power freed from the constraints of the natural world.

(Mitchell 2000: xi)

It is in fact this claim to universality that has been the element behind the exclusion of non-Western modernism in the arts, as the different regions of the world continue their quest to be part of it. Yet as Mufti argues,

the genuine alternative to this universalism of contemporary Eurocentric thought is not a retreat into the local, into so many localities, but rather a *general* account of the play of the particular in the universalizing process of capitalist-imperial modernity.

(Mufti 2005: 122)

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

In light of these issues, we are faced with another unresolved problem: the contested geopolitically designated region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It has been generally agreed that MENA consists of the block known as the Arab world (another contested term based on the dominant commonality but not exclusivity of the Arabic language), Iran, and Turkey. In addition to its long Islamic history, this vast region shares post-colonial experiences as well as a collective marginality in the art canon. But beyond that, differences and particularities abound.

This problem is heightened by the issue of periodization – when does modernism begin and end in MENA? The official metanarrative situates the birth of modernism in the region during the period of colonialism that brought the stagnant, under-developed territories of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires in violent confrontation with the modern West. The resulting art is commonly explained in terms of Orientalism – that the West became obsessed with the ‘timelessness’ and ‘backwardness’ of the East as the exotic other, while the East was in awe of the progressiveness of the ‘superior civilization’. The West was designated as the leader and the East as a perpetual imitator, thus positioning modernism of the region as belated and imitative, within its historical development in Europe.³

More research is needed to reverse the arrogant belief in a historical and creative ‘black out’ during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to move beyond official narratives of modernism in MENA that simply follow the general temporal divisions established by Western history.

A possible approach is to view modern art in MENA as dialectical and discursive reticulations encompassing global influences, discontinuity, and rupture. Moreover, the broad narrative must be accepted as nonlinear and non-chronological in history and production. Instead, we might focus on certain themes that reverberate across the region.

Nation building (and assertion) is one such theme, which reflected artists’ awareness of power structures and the need to respond to the emergent local national discourses. Many thus engaged in modernist constructions of national visual identities. Their work in this context was often reflexive, experimental, and subversive, positing various sites of resistance and contestations of European modernism (see the discussion of art groups below for examples).

Another theme is to see art as a form of resistance to counter Orientalist narratives. Arab artists’ defiance of the parameters of modern art as set by Europe included a continued fascination with symbolism and narrative despite negotiating a new

abstract language. Ideological resistance pervaded and motivated most experiments in aesthetics and form, particularly as formulated by movements and artists' groups. Adopting certain Western stylistic paradigms, such as the nude, allowed for what Kirsten Scheid terms *tathqif*, a cultural process that provided a space of aesthetic interaction between the local and the foreign.⁴ In particular, non-representational art allowed artists to articulate intellectual and visual reconciliations of their present and past, especially in response to the dichotomy of tradition and modernity emphasized by European modernism.

For MENA artists, modernity was perceived mostly as a long gradual development rather than an abrupt historical shift. That is expressly why they did not find a contradiction between modernity and history, and saw the legacy of the Enlightenment of no direct consequence to them. Modernity represented moments of renewed energy and creativity, which allowed that mode of understanding to continue beyond its critique and then rejection in Europe.

ART INSTITUTIONS

Art institutions in MENA had a specific role in defining modern art and setting standards. The first ones established in the region had strong ties to archeology as an important element in developing national visual cultures. In the absence of museums of modern art, art institutions educated the public, influencing taste. They were also instrumental in promoting modern art beyond the social circles of the elites.

The Fine Arts Academy in Istanbul was established in 1883 with artist Osman Hamdi Bey as its first director. The academy organized annual exhibitions that started in 1885 as the main venue for artists (Shaw 2011: 57). In Iran, 'new art' had been introduced in earlier Qajar art schools like Dar ul-Funun, as well as those established later like the Madreseh Sanaye Mostazrafeh, which was directed by artist Kamal-al-Molk. In Tehran, the Faculty of Fine Arts was founded in 1940, directed by André Godard, and followed the curriculum of the French Beaux-Arts.⁵

The history of art institutions in the Arab world begins with the establishment of the first art school in Cairo in 1908 by Prince Yusuf Kamal under the directorship of the sculptor Guillaume Laplagne.⁶ Among its first students was Mahmoud Mokhtar, who became Egypt's leading pioneer artist and is considered the father of modern Arab sculpture. Upon completion of his studies, he became the first Egyptian artist to be sent on a scholarship to Paris, where he exhibited regularly at the Salon des Artistes Français. Despite recent arguments that question the nationalistic traits in his work, he did emphasize a strong connection to Egypt's Pharaonic past. In *Egyptian Awakening* (1919–28), executed in pink granite and a style reminiscent of hieroglyphics, Mokhtar juxtaposed the past in the form of a sphinx rising and the future woman (fellaha) unveiling.

In most of the other Arab countries fine arts institutes and academies were founded during the late 1930s and 1940s, with a few much later in the century. Initially, the new art schools were dominated by foreign instructors. Iraq was an exception where the Institute of Fine Arts, established in 1936, employed only native Iraqi instructors.⁷ Other countries were introduced to modern art through Arab and foreign artists who settled there or through modern education, which employed Arab artists from Egypt and Iraq. While some Palestinian artists studied

in Europe or Egypt during the 1920s and 1930s, modern art did not develop in Palestine until the 1950s.

Additionally, the number of native artists sent to Europe on scholarships increased prior to the Second World War; upon their return, they formed the nucleus of modern art. Art societies were also formed in most countries. In almost every major regional city an initial group of 'Friends of the Arts' was formed in support of artists. They became influential in providing public access to the work of new MENA artists and in raising awareness of their art.

ART GROUPS

Throughout the region artists' groups were formed and further facilitated the dissemination of modern art ideals beyond official institutions. Many were short-lived, but a number had an impact that became highly influential. The importance of their role coincided with the social, political, and intellectual ideas of the time. Some paralleled political parties and opposition groups in presenting a united front against Western forces.

Two concerns occupied the majority of artists of the region during most of the twentieth century. The first was to define a national (local or regional) artistic identity through style and content. The second was to engage with international art. They rebelled against naturalism and realism, which had dominated recent artistic tradition and opted for more revolutionary styles. As avant-garde groups, they changed the course of the aesthetic debate, which had been thus far preoccupied with thematic interpretation, to a more formalist focus on the unity between content and form, with styles evolving from socio-cultural realities.

The Society of Ottoman Artists initially formed as an informal friends' gathering grew in size and influence under the patronage of Prince Abdülmecid. The 18 issues of its journal, published between 1911 and 1914, facilitated a public debate about art and its role in society. Following the creation of the new republic of Turkey, the gathering changed its name to the Organization of Turkish Artists in 1921, the Union of Turkish Fine Arts in 1926 and the Union of Fine Arts in 1929. Later, independent artists' groups joined actively in the de-Ottomanization of the new nation in its transformation from an empire to a modern republic. The D Group – whose name reflects being the fourth group of artists formed after the formation of the new republic, and whose members were devoted to cubism and constructivism – aligned itself with the goals of the new nation and participated in various state initiatives that glorified the republic.

One of Iran's most notable modern art groups is the coalition of artists known as the Saqqakhaneh school, who are credited with forging a distinct Iranian style. They rejected revival models that were promoted by the official institutions and instead explored their past art traditions and iconography, popular culture, folk art, calligraphy, and international modernism, each in a unique way. Distinguished among the artists is the sculptor Parviz Tanavoli who, in the absence of a sculpture tradition, negotiated history and mythology to devise his signature style. Charles Hossein Zenderoudi explored Persian calligraphy's abstraction, while Mohamed Ehsai's experiments further blurred the lines between calligraphy and abstraction.

Along with nationalism, other influences helped to shape Arab artists' groups, including the outbreak of the Second World War, the emergence of the Palestinian issue, the Muslim Brotherhood's anti-Western ideas, the increasing influence of the left wing, and pan-Arabism. The political and intellectual atmosphere of Egypt in the late 1930s, dominated by enthusiastic voices of opposition groups against the British and against the Egyptian government (including the nationalist, socialist, and communist parties), triggered a revolutionary reaction in artists.

The Egyptian group Art and Liberty included the most important and creative artists of the period. Instigated by the poet and polemicist Georges Henein in 1938, the group responded equally to the events of the Second World War and the internal political situation in Egypt. Henein, who was part of a Francophone group in the early 1930s, was a champion of surrealism, which he perceived as transnational and thus more relevant for Egypt than cubism or futurism (Davezac 1994: 46). He initiated an Egyptian surrealist group in 1937. In response to the *For a Revolutionary Independent Art* manifesto issued in Mexico by the French surrealist poet André Breton, the exiled ex-Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky and the painters Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and the subsequent formation of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art (FIARI in French), the Art and Liberty group was formed as a FIARI cell to combat fascist art and socialist realism and published a manifesto entitled *Long Live Low Art*.

The group mounted five controversial annual 'Independent Art Expositions' in the period between 1940 and 1945 in Cairo as well as being involved in a number of periodicals, including *Don Quichotte* (17 weekly issues, 6 December 1939–29 March 1940) and *al-Tatawwur* (seven monthly issues, January–July 1940), edited by the surrealist Anwar Kamil and promoted at its launch as 'the first *avant-garde* literary and artistic review for Arabic youth'. Nevertheless, the Art and Liberty were not a surrealist group, but rather consisted of a coalition of mostly left-wing artists and activists who joined in radical social, educational, and political activities while aiming for 'open creative expression and more personal and political liberties' (LaCoss 2010: 84). Despite continuous opposition and tension within the Egyptian society surrounding the group, their exhibitions were significant in introducing Egypt to new artistic trends. Their intent was to shock and surprise the public in an effort to break the norms.

The Iraqi *Jamaat Baghdad Lil Fan al-Hadith* (the Baghdad Group of Modern Art) was founded in 1951 by the Iraqi artist Jewad Selim. Members of the group were Iraq's most prominent and creative artists who championed the notion of '*istilham al-turath*', seeking inspiration from tradition, and developed an artistic vision, which was historical as well as modern in its orientation.⁸ The act of *istilham* proposed a renegotiation of tradition in order to discover contemporary aesthetics. Selim worked at the Directorate of Antiquities in Baghdad (1940–5), and had developed an appreciation for Mesopotamian art. He was trained on a government scholarship in Paris (1938–9), in Rome (1939–40) and, after the Second World War, in England (1946–8). Upon his return to Iraq, he headed to the Department of Sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad. In his work, Selim created symbols that signified a visual Iraqi identity through intellectualizing folk motifs and abstraction, which further de-exoticized and de-orientalized the visual production (Shabout 2007: 27–8).



Figure 53.1 Georges Sabbagh (1877–1951), *Maternités Arabes* (Arab Motherhood), 1920.

Oil on canvas, 195 x 129 x 2.5 cm. Mathaf Collection, MAT.2007.1.1633.
Collection Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. ADAGP, Paris and DACS,
London 2014.

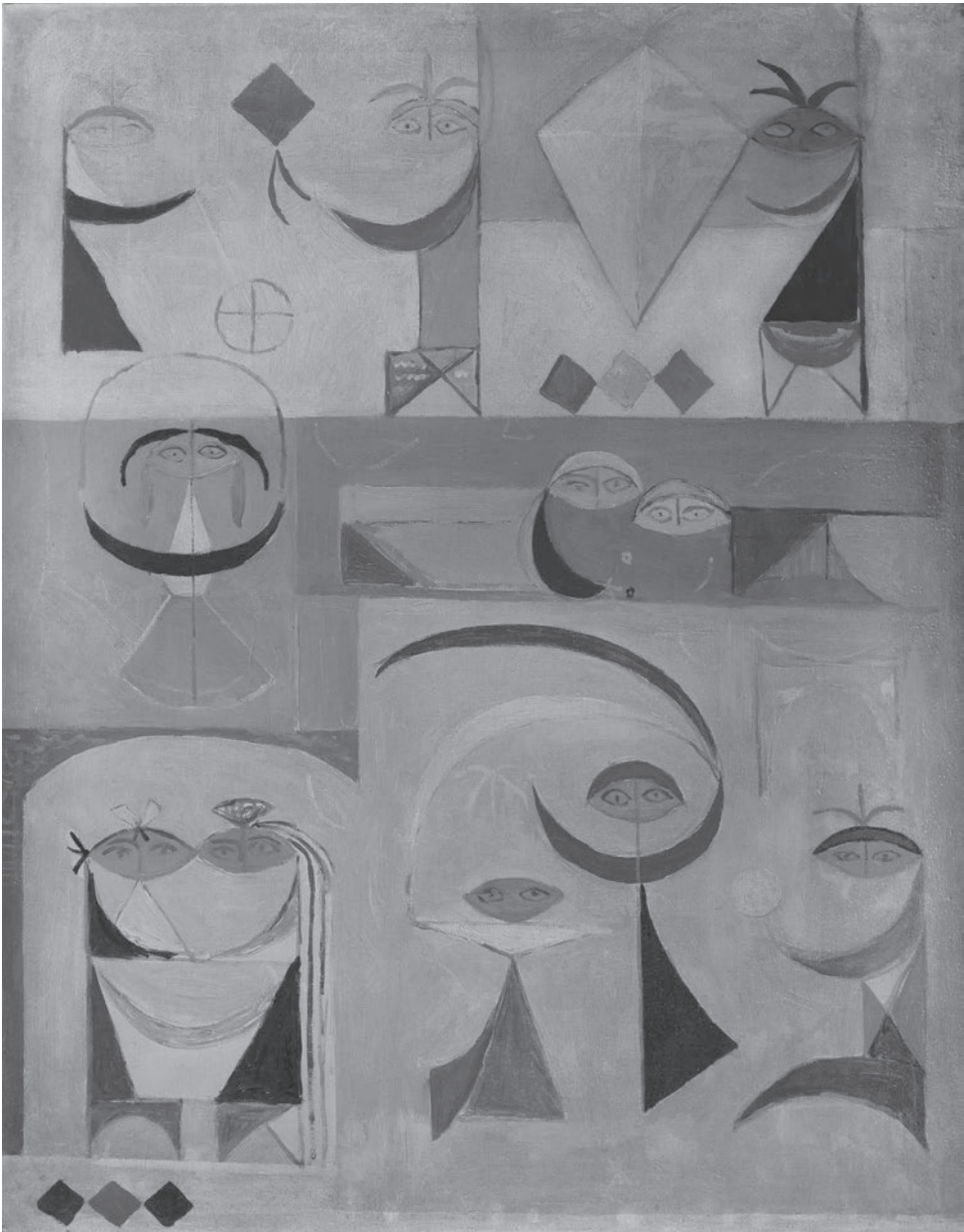


Figure 53.2 Jewad Selim (1921–61), *Children Playing*, 1953–4.
Oil on canvas, 90.4 x 71.2 cm. Mathaf Collection, 8513 MAT.2007.1.3300.
Collection Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

The Group's objectives, as articulated by artist Shakir Hassan Al Said, who wrote the manifesto issued at their first exhibit, was to forge an artistic consciousness capable of defining a unique direction. They declared,

We will build that which was destroyed in the realm of pictorial art in Iraq since the thirteenth century school of Yehya al-Wasiti and we will connect the chain that was broken when Baghdad fell to the hands of the Mongols. A new trend in painting will solve the (artistic) identity problem in our contemporary awakening by following the footsteps of the thirteenth century (Iraqi) painters. The new generation of artists finds the beginning of a guiding light in the early legacy of their forefathers.

(Ali 1997: 161)

Members of the group were very concerned with modern artists' relationship with their public and assumed specific social responsibilities that included educating the public and striking a balance between individual and group freedom and creativity. After Selim's untimely death in 1961, the group remained active until around 1971. The significance of their ideas and experiments set new standards and direction for the development of Iraqi modern art that were to influence other Arab artists as well.

In Morocco, artists Farid Belkahia, who was the director of the École des Beaux Arts in Casablanca (1962–74), and Ahmed Cherkaoui, who received part of his training in Paris and Prague, were joined by a group of other artists – instructors, as they initiated the replacement of the old classical models by Moroccan artefacts, and included Arabic calligraphy, in the school's curriculum. They became known as The Casablanca School. They not only aimed to break away from academic teaching and naive painting, but also to eradicate the distinction between crafts and fine arts they had inherited from the West in order to reconcile the past with the present. They boycotted exhibition halls run by foreign embassies and instead exhibited their work in public squares along with popular crafts and performers. Belkahia replaced conventional art materials with natural ones, including brass, skin, henna, and saffron. Cherkaoui was the first Moroccan artist to explore native motifs referencing Berber tattoos, rugs, and jewelry.

Similarly, The Old Khartoum School, formed in the mid-1950s by a group of Sudanese painters and sculptors, aspired to discover their artistic identity from within their heritage while avoiding Western concepts or methods as much as possible. They adapted African cultural traditions, Islamic visual tradition, and local customs through modern Indigenous concepts, and explored the graphic values of Arabic calligraphy. The artist Osman Waqialla emphasized the multiple dimensions of calligraphy through visualizing letterforms as living entities and manipulating the space created between them.

As pan-Arabism climaxed in the mid twentieth century, Arab artists became more connected. The first meeting for Arab artists was held in Damascus in 1971 and resulted in the establishment of the Union of Arab Plastic Artists. It held its first conference in 1973 in Baghdad, followed by the first Arab Biennale in Baghdad in 1974 and in Rabat, Morocco, in 1976. Other art exhibits and festivals were held in different Arab cities, such as Al-Wassity Festival organized in Baghdad in 1972 and the annual Cultural Musim Asilah inaugurated in Morocco in 1978.

Other important art groups were formed around the region later in the century, signifying further evolutions and shifts. However, the political instability in the region, the wars and civil unrest, periodically halted the progress of art and eventually caused artists' migration to the West. The enthusiastic environment of the early and mid twentieth century as well as group activities stopped as governments took control over the direction of art. The cultural crisis that accompanied *al-Naksa* – the 1967 Six-Day War – added new demands on Arab artists. Notions of originality and authenticity, so central to Western modern art, took on a different meaning within the context of MENA art.

NOTES

1. A number of studies have argued that modernity had its origin within a global exchange and interaction between West and non-West. For examples, see Abu-Lughod 1989 and Gran 1996.
2. This is a fact acknowledged by many of us in the field. Witness, e.g., the Third Annual Conference of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran and Turkey, themed *On Likeness and Difference: Modern Art of the Middle East and the Confines of Modernism*, and held at Kevorkian Center, New York University, October 19–20, 2013.
3. See Said 1993 and 1994.
4. Scheid explains Tathqif as 'recategorizing norms for interaction and self-scrutiny' (2010: 203).
5. See Daftari and Diba 2013: 47.
6. The idea of an art school was opposed by some religious factions until the reformer Mohammed Abduh settled the question (Karnouk 1988: 4).
7. The Ministry of Education in Iraq founded the Music Institute, which became the Institute of Fine Arts in 1936, and later included the Department of Painting and Sculpture in 1939.
8. The verb *Istilham* is derived from *Ilham*: inspiration; instinct, which is derived from the root *lhm*: to inspire; to pray.

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PART VIII

CANADA AND
THE UNITED STATES



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CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

MODERNIST INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES



Leif Sorensen

In Canada and the United States modernism emerges from transnational engagements with global intellectual movements while also grappling with local intellectual, cultural, and political developments that reflect the changing place of these nations in the world. Canadian and US expatriates played crucial roles in the emergence of European modernist thought and aesthetics. Similarly, exchanges of ideas among Latin American, Caribbean, Canadian, and US modernists affected the trajectory of modernism in the Americas.¹ While these international movements were taking form, US and Canadian artists and thinkers developed domestic versions of modernism. The forces that influenced their efforts included the following: an influx of immigration in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the rise of industrialization and mass production, an explosion of popular culture, and a shift in the global centre of military and economic power away from Europe. Along with common modernist concerns with representation, language, epistemology, and primitivism, US and Canadian modernisms are also shaped by the emergence of pragmatism, the anthropological concept of culture, cultural pluralism, and nativism.

A growing sense of US and Canadian intellectual, economic, and political independence from Europe shapes the distinctiveness of their versions of modernism. The two wars that bookend the period, the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Second World War, illustrate this development. The conclusion of the Spanish-American War left the United States in control of former Spanish colonies ranging from the Philippines to Puerto Rico. By the end of the Second World War, the United States military occupied territory from Berlin to Tokyo and had a monopoly on the destructive power of atomic weapons. The emergence of the United States signalled a major shift in the geopolitics of the Americas as Canada, Mexico, and Caribbean nations began to position themselves in relation not only to the European nations that had been or were still their colonial rulers, but also to this new superpower.

In 1904 Henry James returned to the United States for the first time in 20 years. During his travels he encountered what he called the ‘Accent of the Future’ in a café in Manhattan’s Lower East Side (James 1987 [1907]: 99). This accent, which emerged from the mouths of the café’s immigrant patrons, converted the domestic and commercial spaces of the Lower East Side into ‘torture-rooms of the living idiom’, as

it twisted English pronunciation and vocabulary in unprecedented ways (99). Policy-makers and educators in Canada and the United States shared James' anxiety about the future of spoken language. United States officials sought to regularize language use either to resist change or to codify an independent American language. In Canada the situation was even more complex, as the status of French as an official language was recognized to varying degrees in different provinces. Consequently, the common modernist concern with language as a flawed means of representing reality takes on additional socio-political dimensions.

Where James lamented such changes, others found in them new modes of expression. William Carlos Williams declared that he got his poetry from 'out of the mouths of Polish mothers' (Williams 1951: 311) and Gertrude Stein used the rhythms and accents of German immigrants and African-American styles of English in her 1909 novel *Three Lives*. African-American modernists like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston also found aesthetic and conceptual resources in African-American English. Some artists looked farther afield for inspiration. Classical Chinese verse was important to modernist poets like Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell, who translated volumes of Chinese classical poetry (Pound's 1915 *Cathay* and Lowell's *Fir-Flower Tablets* 1921). Pound found in the Chinese character a model of immediate, trustworthy signification.

Using language to capture a direct relationship to things was a common concern of modernist poets and philosophers. The imagist movement associated with Pound, Lowell, H.D., and William Carlos Williams attempted to treat objects directly in poetry. While imagism was active only from 1914 to 1917, the concern with concrete language persists in later works such as Williams's *Paterson*, the first book of which includes the line 'no ideas but in things' (Williams 1963: 6), and Wallace Stevens' 'Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself' (1990 [1954]). Pragmatist philosophers like William James and John Dewey were similarly skeptical of abstraction, favouring practical knowledge instead.

Pragmatism was a significant development in modernist philosophy. James and Dewey, influenced by Charles Sanders Peirce, broke with the idealism of much nineteenth-century philosophy on the grounds that 'the contradictions of real life are absent from it' (James 1995 [1907]: 8). Instead of abstract principles, pragmatists advocated empiricism and sought to connect philosophy with the scientific method. James defined the difference between true and false ideas in terms of their utility and ability to be verified or validated by experience. The influence of pragmatism is widespread in the modernist era, affecting not only theories of language and truth but also public policy, especially regarding education. Dewey's educational philosophies and practices – widely adopted in the US educational system – emphasized the role of the school as a space in which students can learn from experience.

Although pragmatism does not explicitly address race relations, it became an important component of modernist African-American thought because of James' influence on his students W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. Du Bois was a leading black diasporic intellectual who founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Locke helped to initiate the New Negro Renaissance, now often referred to as the Harlem Renaissance, and edited the important anthology *The New Negro* in 1925. Both Du Bois and Locke adapted pragmatic methods to discuss the complex position of African Americans in a segregated society.

In the opening lines of his 1903 opus *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois declared: 'the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line' (Du Bois 1995 [1903]: 41). While it is easy to limit the ramifications of Du Bois's statement to a comment on United States race relations, it is best understood as a reflection on the key role that ethnic and racial difference played in demarcating the boundaries of different zones of modernity, whether those spaces be the segregated neighbourhoods into which African Americans were pushed, the reservations to which the Indigenous inhabitants of Canada and the United States had been removed, or present and former colonies. The Cuban poet, essayist, and political activist José Martí raises similar concerns about the uneven development characteristic of modernization in his seminal essay 'Our America' ('Nuestra América'), which he wrote while in exile in New York City and published in newspapers in New York and Mexico City in January 1891. Martí called attention to the threat posed by the United States to Latin American efforts at self-determination. He influentially divided the Americas into two groups: 'Our America', which comprised the nations of the Caribbean and Latin America, and 'the America that is not ours', comprised of Canada and the United States. Du Bois's metaphor of the colour line complements this project by calling attention to underdevelopment within Anglophone America and Canada.

Du Bois's work is part of a vital body of black diasporic modernist thought. Among his rivals was the pan-Africanist political activist Marcus Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914 and moved his organization to Harlem in 1917. Garvey led the 'Back to Africa' movement, which held that Africa was the proper homeland for all black people. Garvey and the UNIA clashed with Du Bois and the NAACP, as the latter camp sought to ameliorate racial relations within the United States. The ideas and slogans of both parties, as well as many other black activists, circulated in magazines and newspapers printed by their organizations, like Garvey's *Negro World* (1918–33) and the NAACP's official magazine *The Crisis* (1910–present), which Du Bois edited until 1934. The interests of black activists also crossed over with those of communist and socialist activists, especially in the pages of *The Messenger* (1917–28), which dubbed itself the only radical Negro magazine in America and published editorials critical of both Garvey and Du Bois.

Feminist activists also pointed out the inequalities that persisted in modernity. The most visible and broad-based activist movement was the drive for women's suffrage, which peaked in intensity in the 1910s. In the United States, the National Women's Party, led by Alice Paul, organized a series of protests at the White House during 1917. Other supporters of the suffrage movement included Margaret Sanger, who also advocated for women's access to birth control as a means of sexual and reproductive self-determination. Ironically, the suffrage movement itself failed to be completely egalitarian. African-American women suffragists felt marginalized and betrayed by Paul's lack of interest in racial equality. Other critics of the movement, like the anarchist Emma Goldman, claimed that its aims were insufficiently radical because it did not advocate revolutionary change. Canadian women on active military service or with male relatives in active service were enfranchised at the federal level in 1917, and Parliament extended the vote to all women of 21 years of age in Dominion elections in 1918. All Canadian provinces except Quebec enfranchised women between 1916 and 1925. Quebec extended the franchise to women in 1940.

The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1920 guaranteed women in the United States the right to vote in all elections.

The radical energies of feminist thought extended beyond the fight for the vote. Attendees of Mabel Dodge's New York City salons explored taboo sexual desires in efforts to undo the repression that Freudian psychoanalysis had diagnosed within the modern psyche and to strike back against sexual double standards. The sexually liberated 'New Woman' was associated with the popular image of the flapper, whose bobbed hair could be seen on magazine covers and movie screens for most of the 1920s. Although potentially empowering, the image of the flapper could also be used to trivialize feminism, making it seem to be nothing more than a fashion adopted by frivolous young women. In actuality, feminist thinkers were involved in the great debates of the era, ranging from the vote, to war, to economic and labour conditions.

Labour relations were tumultuous throughout the period, which featured many violent conflicts pitting striking workers and union organizers against agents of the employers, often supported by government forces. The bloodiest was the Ludlow Massacre of 20 April 1914, in which the Colorado State Militia attacked a camp of striking mineworkers employed by John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s Colorado Fuel and Iron Company near Ludlow, Colorado. The development of the assembly line opened up a new relationship between workers and their bosses. This new system of automation, Fordism, is named after Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company. Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film *Modern Times* satirizes the Fordist factory. Chaplin's character races to keep up with an assembly line that keeps moving faster at the boss' command. As the workers speed up, their bodies become completely dedicated to the few regimented movements required to keep the line moving, suggesting that the workers themselves have become automatons.

The situation of industrial workers opened up new avenues of labour organization. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was the first union to prioritize organizing industrial workers. A confederation of anarchists, socialists, and other anti-capitalists, the IWW sought to unite all workers and played an early role in the unionization of the emerging class of migrant agricultural workers brought into being by modern agribusiness. In contrast, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) focused on craft unions and opposed industrial unionization. Tension within the AFL led John L. Lewis to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a confederation of unions that had been expelled from the AFL because of their interest in unionizing industrial workers. In addition to shaping the lives of workers, the changing conditions of labour affected high and popular art. Early folk and blues singers chronicled the lives of agricultural workers, miners, and industrial labourers and writers sympathetic to the labour movement like John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, and Upton Sinclair explored class tensions in their work. Union members and their supporters were frequently targeted as subversive elements within the nation and represented as advocates of a foreign ethos. The AFL responded by adopting a nativist position, supporting restrictive legislation on European and East Asian immigration to Canada and the United States.

The turn to nativism was a response to the unprecedented scale of immigration to the Canada and the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The popular sentiment against immigration, which targeted immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, East Asia, and, to a lesser extent, Mexico and the Caribbean, is evident in

publications like Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920) and Madison Grant's *The Passing of The Great Race* (1916). Stoddard's book appears in distorted form in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) when Tom Buchanan refers to "The Rise of the Colored Empires" by this man Goddard' (Fitzgerald 2003 [1925]: 17). Grant and Stoddard advocated managing the United States population in accordance with eugenics, a theory of human behaviour that holds that most traits are inherited and that certain races are more advanced than others. These views were influential; prominent figures in the eugenics movement provided expert advice to the United States Congress on immigration law. Advocates of eugenics had their greatest triumphs in the 1920s. Canada banned immigration from China in 1923 and the United States barred immigration from all Asian nations except for Japan and the Philippines and imposed immigration quotas on eastern and southern European nations in 1924.

The anthropologist Franz Boas sought to discredit eugenics by critiquing the widely accepted concept of race. He researched variations in human morphology to show that what eugenicists thought were fixed and inherited physical traits were subject to change. Instead of race, Boas advocated understanding differences among people through the concept of culture, defined as a fluid and dynamic set of behaviours, beliefs, and values. He and his students, such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Arthur Kroeber, and Edward Sapir, practiced cultural relativism, a method that understands cultures as functional systems, and historical particularism, which held that cultures develop differently. These ideas broke from the social evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century, which asserted that cultures move through the same stages of development at different rates, becoming increasingly functional. Boas' rejection of racial determinism and cultural hierarchies led Du Bois to invite him to give a commencement address at Atlanta University.

The question of national culture was also disputed in this period. Although radical nativists opposed immigration on the grounds that immigrants were inherently undesirable, others in Canada and the United States advocated the acceptance of immigrants willing to assimilate. In the United States the 'melting pot' provided a metaphor for assimilation, which included learning English, adopting national foodways, hygienic practices, and modes of dress. This metaphor took on its most spectacular form in the graduation ceremonies of the Ford English School, in which immigrant Ford employees who had completed courses in English, culture, citizenship, and hygiene, would walk into a stylized pot wearing the costumes of their native countries only to emerge, after some energetic stirring by their instructors, wearing suits, the change in costume signalling their transformation into Americans.

The melting pot had multiple critics, including Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne in the United States and John Murray Gibbon in Canada. Kallen and Bourne used pragmatic methods to advocate for cultural pluralism. Where nativists like Stoddard and Grant distrusted assimilation because they were convinced that immigrants were too different to be successfully incorporated into the nation, pluralists saw difference as something to be valued. Building on the pragmatic idea that truth can only be verified by experience, pluralism holds that different people's experiences may not validate the same truths. For Kallen and Bourne the Ford English School's graduation ceremony would signal not the production of newly minted Americans but instead the destruction of cultural diversity in the name of a mass-

produced Americanism. Gibbon and other Canadian critics of assimilation proposed the cultural mosaic, in which each component retains its particularity while contributing to a collective design, as an alternative to the melting pot. The metaphor of the mosaic, elaborated in Gibbon's 1938 *Canadian Mosaic*, provides an early version of multiculturalism, which became official Canadian policy in the second half of the twentieth century.

Cultural pluralism also signalled new developments in the roles that Canada and the United States were imagined to play in world history. In his 1916 essay 'Trans-national America', Bourne argued that the influence of European nationalism had blinded citizens of the United States to the nation's true status as 'the first international nation' (Bourne 1964 [1916]: 117). Writing before the United States entered the First World War, which he opposed, Bourne elaborated a utopian vision of the United States as an alternative to the destructive version of modernity that had engulfed Europe. Bourne hoped that a pluralist, transnational nation could transcend the divisions that troubled modern Europe and point to a cosmopolitan future in which conflicts of national interest would no longer be resolved through war.

Pluralists also saw a threat to cultural diversity in consumer culture, which distributed standardized products across the world. New media proliferated wildly in the first half of the century and improved networks of distribution allowed them to reach audiences everywhere. Methods of mass production, combined with fast and cheap distribution, resulted in a boom in popular print culture. Slick magazines like *Vanity Fair* promised to bring sophisticated modernist culture to readers far from metropolitan centres. At the same time, pulp magazines provided readers and authors with venues dedicated to popular genres such as romance, detective stories, science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Popular music also took on a new role in everyday life. The rise of the commercial record industry and radio enabled individuals to experience music privately and regional sounds to circulate broadly. While these technologies made it possible to experience music in solitude, they also opened up new modes of sociality among those devoted to particular stations, styles, or performers. Similarly, moviegoers, grouped together in a dark room with their eyes turned to a screen, could be seen either as a sign of a dystopian future in which individuals trade authentic experiences for machine-produced simulations or as a new popular audience. The rise of the star system, in which aspiring performers were groomed to become full-blown celebrities, often changing their names, accents, and appearance in the process, prompted additional concern that popular culture was nothing more than a series of deceptive ruses. The perceived passivity of popular audiences led many modernist cultural commentators to represent mass culture as a feminized threat to male-dominated high culture.

The spectre of a mass-produced, homogenous culture, combined with a sense that the promises of progressive modernization had proven false, led many to search for alternatives to modernity in folk and regional cultures. Edward Sapir lamented the domination of mass-produced 'canned cultures' and the endangered status of genuine cultures, which orient their participants meaningfully in the world (Sapir 1924: 429). Although Sapir did not assume that older cultures were always genuine, the primitivist desire to find meaning and stability in cultures that seemed less affected by modernization was strong. The forces driving primitivism in Canada and the United States are similar to those at work in Europe with the important distinction that in

the Americas the presence of Indigenous peoples and of a substantial diasporic black population meant that those seeking contact with the purportedly primitive could do so while remaining within the boundaries of their own nations.

The Southwestern United States became an especially popular destination for those seeking escape from urban modernity. For instance, Mabel Dodge traded her New York salon for Taos, New Mexico, where she met and married a Native American man, Tony Luhan. She and other members of the Taos Society of Artists drew international attention to the region and to the art and artefacts of the Taos Pueblo people. Notable figures like the writers D.H. Lawrence and Mary Austin, the painter Georgia O'Keefe, and the photographers Ansel Adams and Alfred Stieglitz spent time in Taos. More broadly, the idea of taking Native American art as an inspiration for a particularly American aesthetics travelled widely. For example, the little magazine *Poetry* published an issue devoted to poems based on and inspired by Native American oratory in February 1917 and Harriet Monroe, *Poetry's* editor, encouraged American artists to take their models from Indigenous sources rather than Greek and Latin classics in her editorials.

An element of the appeal of folk art was that it seemed to be one of the last refuges of craftsmanship in an era in which the hand of the creative individual was increasingly being replaced by machines. Literary critics like Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren established a method of closely reading individual literary works, usually lyric poems, to reveal the writer's craftsmanship. This New Criticism arose in part as a response to the poetics of modernists like T.S. Eliot, whose essays influenced the movement. New Critics argued that contemplating literature helped readers break out of the cycles of acquisition and consumption characteristic of consumer culture and enabled critical reflection. Many New Critics taught in universities, where they sought to foster in their students this capacity for aesthetic contemplation. Other influential academics such as Northrop Frye, based at the University of Toronto, and René Wellek, who founded Yale's department of comparative literature, proposed alternative models for the professional study of literature.

The sense that modernity's promises might not be fulfilled, or were illusory from the start, was exacerbated by the Great Depression, which began with the New York stock market crash of 1929 and affected the global economy for the ensuing decade. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal promised to protect citizens from the instability of capitalist markets by creating a welfare state. One group of New Deal policies sought to secure employment for artists and writers and to foster public interest in the arts. The Federal Writer's Project (FWP) employed thousands of writers. The FWP and its analogues for artists in other media fostered an image of artists as professional workers. Although many artists embraced these opportunities, others saw the enterprise as a flawed attempt to impose organization and bureaucracy on art. Among the critics of this drive to collective order was Ayn Rand, who dramatized the struggle between a rebellious creative individual and a stifling New Deal order in *The Fountainhead* (1943).

The economic crisis of the Great Depression was exacerbated by the events leading to the Second World War. Although a reluctant participant, the United States emerged from the war as the preeminent global power. The dropping of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 marked the beginning of

a new age of warfare and geopolitics that would quickly take the form of the Cold War. The destructive power of the bombs further emphasized the extent to which the technological developments of modernity had unleashed unprecedented forces.

NOTES

- I. To trace these pan-American connections, see also Amy Oliver's chapter in this volume on intellectual currents in Latin America.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES



Rhodri Windsor Liscombe

Post-Second World War Canada and the United States is where the modern movement(s) in architecture, planning, and design attained an apogee but also a nadir. This chapter assays that evolving trajectory and the range of modernist practice in Canada and the United States over the ensuing decades.

The Canadian and US embrace of advanced industrial processes, technologies, and materials provided significant models and stimulus for the European progenitors of modernist design: an ongoing interchange figured in designs for the chief icons of modernism – the automobile, prefabricated house, and engineered city – completed by that transatlantic figure, Buckminster Fuller. The reinforced concrete system patented by the American Albert Kahn and the Canadian Ernest Wilby paralleled invocation of both countries' industrial construction in the conceptualization of modern architecture by Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, and reflected significant design reform in Canada and the United States. Centred on high-rise commercial architecture, urban redevelopment and residential design, it articulated endeavours to rationalize and make relevant historical stylistic legacy, as attempted by Daniel Burnham or Paul Cret in the United States and by John Lyle or Ernest Cormier in Canada; to liberalize craft and vernacular tradition, achieved most inventively by Frank Lloyd Wright, exotically by Bernard Maybeck, and stolidly by Percy Nobbs; and to developments in city planning such as Clarence Perry's influential Neighbourhood Unit. A pragmatic functionalism emerged with particular clarity in the work of Irving Gill, anticipating the transplanted European modernism of Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra. Their presence, and the example of European modernism practice promoted in the celebrated 1932 Museum of Modern Art travelling exhibition on the International Style, curated by H.R. Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, spurred a corresponding Canadian and US radicalism. Stimulated by attempts to recover from the Great Depression, and especially the Works Progress Administration programme in the United States, this radicalism shifted from the still academic ethos of the geometrical deco and streamlined moderne to the rigorous functionalist aesthetic of such major practitioners as Howe and Lescaze, plus a growing cadre of designers like the Canadians Ernest Barott or C.B.K. Van Norman. Barott additionally typified the increasing linkage between international design and contractor/building

material marketing, working in association with Canada Cement and companies such as

T. Eaton in Toronto to sponsor house design competitions. The phenomenon resonated in other alliances, prompting modernization – from engineering to interior design – as in the careers of Raymond Loewy or Donald Deskey.

The modernist cause was further energized by those many designers who, escaping fascism and totalitarianism, helped to redirect professional practice and training across Canada and the United States. Besides Gropius at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago – both in close contact with the University of Manitoba School of Architecture in Winnipeg headed by John Russell – there were other incubators, including the Black Mountain and Cranbrook schools, and the studios of Ray and Charles Eames or Bert Binning. The Eameses and Binning promoted the Allied Arts, embracing artwork in architecture and interior design (accompanying Canadian and US enthusiasm for Scandinavian aesthetic and products marked by major awards to Alvar Aalto by the American Institute of Architects and Royal Architectural Institution of Canada). Similarly, Canadian and US architectural pedagogy was diverse, as between Le Corbusian-inspired McGill University or craft-inclined University of Oregon. All these factors helped ally professional and popular(ist) attitudes alongside public policy and private enterprise.

The alliance was especially evident in Canadian Reconstruction and United States federal programmes such as the Housing Acts enacted from 1949. The former was coined for the Advisory Committees on Reconstruction, modelled on British legislation that adopted ideas of social planning from such publications as those sanctioned by the Congr s Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). The programmes sought comprehensive redevelopment through government intervention that was married with corporate expansion. In Canada the amalgam was typified by major infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Canada Highway or St Lawrence Seaway, and, with particular respect to urban planning and architecture, the creation in 1946–7 of the Central (later Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The CMHC was charged with funding private house ownership, public housing, and design education. In the States, the endeavour to weld social democratizing with commercial economic interests was most evident in the Housing and Urban Design authority together with massive interstate highway and urban expressway construction. The linkage, but also the disparate power relations between Canada and the United States, is defined by cross-border auto-manufacture leading to the Autopact, the construction of the DEW-line air defence system, NORAD and the wash of American film and television programming, notwithstanding the national remit of the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC).

These initiatives constituted the rebar of the economic and cultural fabric that enabled the widespread application of modernist iconography, if not always its underlying ethos. The 'swords to ploughshares' industrialization was powerfully sustained by media marketing of modern appearance and appliance, from picture window suburban house to school, hospital, community centre, shopping mall, and workplace. Such industrialization contributed to the major phenomenon of the post-1945 decades: massive suburbanization and reconfiguration of the downtown core primarily for commercial function. This outcome confounded the aim of regenerating

the ‘Heart of the City’ argued for by European modernists, notably Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, who taught in Canada and the United States. The organizer of the Exhibition of Town Planning in Poplar, London for the 1951 Festival of Britain, Tyrwhitt was an associate of Jose Sert, Marshall McLuhan, and latterly Constantin Doxiadis (whose Ekistic theory bridged modernist technocratic into proto-ecological planning). This group shared a modernist communitarian and social(ist) democratic vision that was increasingly redirected in Canada and the United States toward an individuated and increasingly segregated – economically and often ethnically – modernization. When in 1968 Gropius published *Apollo in the Democracy*, the consumerist reconfiguration of modernism was apparently triumphant: a phase best defined as ‘Auto-Suburbo-Modernism’.

In post-1945 Canada and the United States, the modernist emphasis on analysis of function, efficiency of structure, and economy of articulation answered the compounding demand for houses and consumer products. It suited the aspirations of the expanding middle class and the needs of differently motivated groups, with the added advantage of masking actual economic disparity through the kind of homogenizing visual modernization represented by the 1950s motel. Nevertheless, considerable variety emerged, spanning from Wright’s idiosyncratic and organic style to Louis Kahn’s ascetic and philosophical functionalism. Wright’s counter-CIAM 1933 Broadacre City scheme was re-exhibited in mid-1950s New York, then being dogmatically transformed along 1920s German Rationalist lines by Robert Moses.

Beyond building post-war community, architecture and design were used to form distinct national identities. In Canada a later phase of modernism, New Brutalism, was consciously adopted for a series of edifices commissioned to celebrate the centennial of Confederation, including the Fathers of Confederation Building in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The United States projected its dominant global and cultural *puissance* through patronage of modernist architects and designers for its World Exposition pavilions and embassy buildings. During the Cold War, modernism was deemed to manifest the superiority of capitalist and commercial regimes, most famously in the ‘Kitchen-Sink Debate’ between Nikita Krushchev and Richard Nixon. Besides a considerable amount of military/naval infrastructure, missile silos and nuclear bunkers included, the Cold War spawned several distinguished modern buildings, notably the Air Force Academy Chapel, at Colorado Springs, Colorado, by Walter Netsch, senior partner in the firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill which was responsible for building among the largest ‘company’ towns for the Manhattan Atomic Project at Oak Ridge in Tennessee. Even the United Nations headquarters in New York reflected the Americanization of modernism as Wallace Harrison reasserted American high-rise practice.

Modernist design accommodated both transcontinental and regional or local currents. The exposed, often exaggerated use of new materials created a vein of domestic architecture that seemed to defy geographical and climatic realities, most experimentally in the country houses of Mies, Johnson, Marcel Breuer, and later, Peter Eisenman. But their combination of artificial and natural materials speaks to the deepest misconception about modernism, namely that it spurned nature. Instead, as Neutra or Arthur Erickson demonstrated just as much as Wright, modernism sought a truer integration with site and landscape that recognized the essentially abstract and technical nature of designed architecture. In urban redevelopment, Canadian and US

modernism enacted a new register of architectural sublimity through a more thorough application of steel, glass, glazed enamel, and reinforced concrete erection. And modernism's capacity to reconstitute urban living reached a technical apogee in Montréal through the construction of a weatherproof underground Mega-city.

Admittedly, the architectural schools inadvertently spawned regurgitation of only partially understood modernist design ploys. But capable young architects, including a growing proportion of women, regenerated government and corporate offices, urban planning departments, individual practices or partnership, and large firms, exemplified in the United States by SOM and in Canada by John B. Parkin Associates. The growing population in Canada, mainly resulting from increased immigration alongside rising individual wealth, necessitated extensive building for education at all levels, health and cultural facilities, as well as spaces for religious observance. The modernist Roman Catholic churches in Québec and the places of worship designed by Kahn or Wright indicate the ready transposition of modernist vocabulary into traditional use.

Among the raft of talented regional architects chiefly renowned for their family houses are, just for the West Coast, John Yeon and Pietro Belluschi in the States, and Ron Thom and Fred Hollingsworth in Canada. Some of the more distinguished Canadian and American modernists established their careers in residential design, from Paul Rudolph to Erickson and Neutra. Indeed, residential and multiple housing design played an important part in Neutra's recognition of the environmentalist potentiality in modernism, articulated in his 1954 *Survival Through Design* (see Goessel 2000).

The professional discourse was equally diverse, in part due to the vigour and variety of architectural journalism epitomized by Eric Arthur's pro-modernist editorship of the journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. Going beyond the fine illustration of new design in the major foreign journals such as *Domus*, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, or *Architectural Review*, Canadian and US journals and magazines such as *Arts and Architecture*, the *J.R.A.I.C.*, *Architectural Forum*, or *The Canadian Architect* (from 1961), together with larger circulation magazines such as *Architectural Digest* and *Western Homes and Living*, enhanced the prestige of modernism, and photography. In turn, architectural photographers, from Julius Schulman to Selwyn Pullan or the Toronto firm of Panda Associates, lent tremendous visual appeal and cultural authority to the modernist architectural project. Furthermore, the journals sustained a high level of reflexive, even self-critical discourse about modernist objectives and practice. This discourse examined the prerequisites of contemporary design – notably about monumentality, symbolism in articulation, visual delight and formal variety – as well as the relationship between architect and client, and, latterly, the diminishing influence of the architect in the construction of the built environment. A popular manifestation of growing dissatisfaction with conventionalized modernization was John Keats's widely read *The Crack in the Picture Window*, first published in 1956.

In the domain of public housing, modernist aspiration for democratic community relapsed into class division and even ethno-racial segregation. Yet in acknowledging such slippage, the vibrancy and diversity of Canadian and US modernism should not be overlooked. The imprint of modernist-inspired or reconfigured building types can seem repetitive but their appearance and affect differs: modern Chicago, Vancouver, New York, Toronto, Los Angeles, or Montréal may share architectural lineaments

but not architectural identity. The new town of Don Mills in Ontario differs in the adaptation of comparable planning and design norms from Levittown in New York, alongside the many market suburban subdivisions constructed across the continent. Similarly, the American Case Study Houses are distinct from the more modest Canadian Trend Houses.

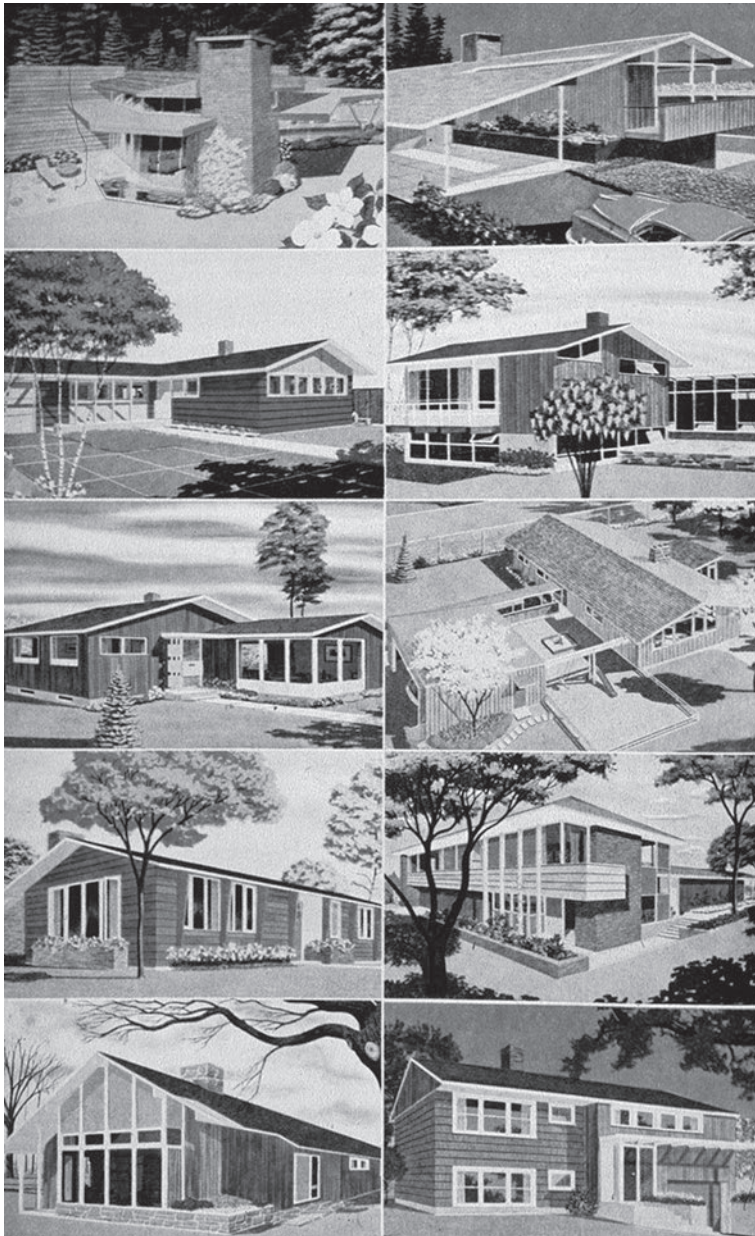


Figure 55.1 Western Woods presents ‘Trend Houses’ from Victoria to Halifax.
Western Homes and Living, 1954.05, p. 28.

Powering through those rhetorical and material fabrics was the automobile, erstwhile cypher of modernist conceptual, mechanical, and even social, reform. The automobile penetrated every dimension of post-war society and environment, undermining the communitarian and comprehensive planning objectives of the Reconstruction and Renewal policy. For example, neither the Jeanne Mance, Montréal, nor the more infamous Pruitt Igoe, St Louis public housing complexes provided parking sufficient for the growth of auto-ownership. In Canada and the United States, such schemes also largely excluded citizen consultation and provision of community or commercial facilities. Particularly below the 49th parallel, the nonetheless magnificently engineered, urban expressways played a significant part in isolating low-income public housing complexes and in implementing mass suburbanization. More generally, and despite rising death and injury statistics, pollution and congestion, the automobile disrupted existing patterns of civic environment across Canada and the United States. Downtown districts increasingly became enclaves of commercial office parking and decrepit housing despite schemes to realize the ideal of a central civic and cultural hub.

The counter discourse to the Canadian and US ‘automobilization’ of modernist planning ideas was voiced with marked success by Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander. Another outcome was the series of Freeway Debates in Canada during the early 1960s, played out at the same time as the massive Decarie network (Autoroute 15) radically reconfigured the physical and social topography of Montréal. In Vancouver and Toronto the counter discourse – one picking up on the humanitarian weft of modernist thought – aborted major inner-city highway construction.

Auto-Suburbo-Modernism corroded broad acceptance of inclusive social purpose in the aftermath of war and the pursuit of comprehensive use urban redevelopment by architect-directed city planning departments. Real estate, commercial, and retail lobbies, plus broader popular opinion, dislocated the modernist vision. Interestingly, the new resource extraction and industrial company towns, such as the Aluminum Company of Canada’s Kitimat in northern British Columbia, more closely followed modernist comprehensive planning principles. Yet the market-financed, automobile-dependent suburbs replicated, indeed popularized, modernist imagery, and often implemented such proto-modernist paradigms as the picturesque utilitarianism of the Garden Suburb or Neighbourhood Unit. The automobile spearheaded the application of new materials and colour schemes, and became the core inhabited space of modern Canada and the United States: transporting the still mainly male population of blue- and white-collar workers to factory or office, children to school or sporting and recreational facilities, families to entertainment and, most regularly, women to stores. Having already inspired new types of shopping precincts, the car successively established the post-1945 viability of the shopping centre (among the earliest being Norgate, north of Seattle and Park Royal in West Vancouver, respectively designed by modernist-influenced architects Victor Gruen and Van Norman).

Consequently, the chief characteristic of modernism’s success in Canada and the United States, and elsewhere, was the reconstitution of its main agenda: the creation of a more efficient, entire and equitable urban demos. Older economic and societal regimes appeared in modernist garb alongside re-emergence of architecture as singular commission and statement of aesthetic form. The effort to transform the architect into an enlightened yet authoritative social engineer, overseeing the

thorough-going rebuilding of urban environment – including, as via CMHC, publication of plan booklets for affordable homes and farmhouses or the embrace of the allied arts and applied design – foundered. Instead, the narrative of Canadian and US modernism became preoccupied with famous architects, famous buildings, and the pre-eminence of elite creativity. Here the elevation of architectural photography is instructive. While often achieving truly remarkable imagery, it tended to exclude the social dimension of space-making in favour of beguiling formalism. An exception was the photojournalism of family residence, in which family members were carefully posed to offset the sheer lines and planes of the architecture. Nonetheless, the most celebrated photographs of such modernist buildings such as Neutra's Desert (Kaufmann) House at Palm Springs in California, or Hart Massey's own residence on the Ottawa River in Ontario, privilege the abstract aesthetic of structure and space. A similar concern with formal purity is apparent in the illustration of such modernist icons as I.M. Pei's Place Ville Marie in Montréal or Mies's Seagram Building in New York. These typified a long tally of architecturally distinguished edifices that marked the resurgence of the Canadian or US city as a patchwork of vested interests and opportunistic enterprises.

In retrospect, corporate and commercial systems effectively appropriated modernism. Alongside the celebrity of major individual architects and firms came a revival of stylism. Its legacy was a primary concern with motifs and effects, as against design approach. But that also enabled modernism in Canada and the United States to span the gamut of ideological and topographical factors as well as building types, and attain particular innovation in architecture for worship and cultural display, exemplified by Marcel Breuer's St John's Abbey at Collegeville, Minnesota, or Whitney Museum in New York. Thus the technically comparable commercial office or high-rise towers designed by Peter Dickinson in eastern Canada, or Eero Saarinen more widely throughout the United States, are distinguished by the variation in their respective architectural articulation. The general scenery of architectonic repetition is interrupted by the remarkable variation in regional modernist idioms and modernist practitioners, from Harwell Harris to Karen Bausman; from Montréal-based Rother, Bland, Trudeau; or from Green, Blankstein, Russell and Associates in Winnipeg to Thompson, Berwick, Pratt in Vancouver.

These architects' careers underscore another under-recognized trajectory in Canadian and US modernism: the evolution in architectural production. Saarinen's move from austere functionalism to expressionist architectonics and experimentation with building materials methods is one instance. Moreover, a high proportion of modernist institutions, market and subsidized housing, commercial and industrial architecture were well designed, serviceable, and durable. The absence of historically charged symbolism also enabled modernism to offer a veritable visual *tabula rasa* for self-inscription of immigrant and formerly marginalized people. In the United States modernism coincides with significant advances in the democratization of its polity, especially with respect to the place of African-American and Latino citizens, and in Canada with the broad acceptance of multiculturalism. The eradication of once divisive cultural baggage of historical articulation is most telling in Canadian and US universities, technical colleges, and public schools. The examples are again legion but famously evinced by Gropius's Graduate School of Design at Harvard, Mies's campus at the Illinois Institute of Technology, and Sharp Thompson Berwick Pratt's successive



Figure 55.2 New York: Seagram Building exterior (*Architectural Record*, 1958.07), p. 145.

additions to the University of British Columbia. Rudolph at Dartmouth College and Kahn – first at the University of Pennsylvania and later the Salk Institute at La Jolla, California – rendered that articulation of inclusivity as aesthetically various as it was formally inventive and imaginatively monumental.

However, the relative uniformity apparent in Canadian and US modernism by the mid-1950s motivated idiosyncratic interpretation (e.g. by Bruce Goff and Frank Gehry), and revival of ancient traditions, European and Indigenous (e.g. by Kahn and Erickson). It also intensified the internal critique, voiced early by Gropius and Rudolph, into rejection of apparent modernist monotony by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Their *Learning from Las Vegas* (1966) mobilized a dynamic of criticism that coursed through the writings of such critic-designers as Peter Blake and Charles Jencks – while prefacing the relatively flaccid revisionist phase(s) denominated postmodernism. Although erstwhile heroes of modernization such as Johnson, Michael Graves, Moshe Safdie, and Peter Rose seemed to embrace a return to symbolic iconography, the hold of modernist material-structural logic remained in their work. If anything, postmodernism's neo-traditional motifism corresponded with heightened media branding of corporation and government in the era of financial deregulation and neo-conservative policy. Not entirely unconnected was the spate of academic writing and exhibitions on the modern movement and legacy funded most consistently by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press and Canadian Centre for Architecture (under the leadership of Phyllis Lambert who had earlier ensured the construction of, arguably, modernism's chief American monument, the Seagram Building). Canadian and US scholars have played a particular part in documenting the modern movement (e.g. Hitchcock, Peter Collins, Kenneth Frampton, and William Curtis); unpacking its significance (e.g. Beatriz Colomina, Sarah Goldhagen, and Joan Ockman); and mobilizing Continental theory to analyze the movement's intellectual genealogy and the cultural politics of its dissemination.

The final trajectories are, first, Canadian and US modernism's resilience, and, second, its renewal. The praxis of modernism has been retrieved, usually with deeper and more experimental consideration, by numerous architects. It persists in a manner that defies attempts at ready conceptual/historical limitation (as indicated by Diane Ghirardo's *Architecture After Modernism* [1996]), or, with reference to the art world, by Charles Thomson and Billy Childish's 'Remodernism' manifesto, providing a genuine basis for design innovation in the work of major Canadian-based and US-based contemporary architects, from Will Bruder and Carlos Ott to Bruce Kuwabara and Bryan MacKay-Lyons. Another measure of modernism's resilience appears in Vancouver, where even in a smaller professional field, robust and inventive veins of modernism are being wrought by John and Patricia Patkau, Peter Cardew, Richard Henriquez, and Peter Busby – each intent upon exploring modernism's ecological potential.

Canadian and US modernism has responded to and reconfigured conditions and potentialities that, although under successive modification, have persisted into the present. Modernist theory and its practice has proved capable of serving a broad array of societal requirements and expectations – and of surmounting its own crisis of cultural relevance.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

CINEMA MODERNISMS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

—♦—
Juan A. Suárez

In the English-speaking world, ‘modernism’ became connected to cinema belatedly, in articles American poet H.D. wrote for the British film journal *Close-Up* in 1930 and 1931. For H.D., ‘modern’ meant a spare aesthetics (‘the lean skyscraper beauty of ultra-modernity’) responsive to contemporary life (H.D. 1998 [1930]: 228). In her view, this definition applied to the expressionist films of the German UFA studios and the Soviet montage films of Sergei Eisenstein and V.I. Pudovkin, abstract films, and the unconventional narratives of James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber – and of *Close-Up* editor Kenneth Macpherson. H.D.’s application of ‘modernism’ to film never caught on; non-commercial films were instead labelled ‘avant-garde’, ‘experimental’, ‘artistic’, ‘independent’, ‘amateur’, and ‘underground’.¹ Despite this terminological gap, the films referred to by these denominations were regarded by most as part of modernism across the arts.

Canadian and US cinematic modernism spans, roughly, from the early 1920s to the early 1970s. Though Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler’s *Manhatta* (1921) is commonly regarded as the first US experimental film, it was predated by the ‘symphonic poems’ (1920) of Dudley Murphy – Fernand Léger’s collaborator in *Ballet Mécanique* (1924).² Cinematic modernism’s end date is harder to establish. The underground films of the early 1960s may mark a transition into postmodernism, but the structural films of the mid-1960s and early 1970s may prolong modernism by another decade.

Alternative cinemas developed in this period include lyrical films; abstract explorations of form, colour, and rhythm; unconventional narratives; and dance films. These modes often converged in a single title. Experimental films were usually short, inexpensive, and influenced by visual arts movements such as US precisionism, Italian and Soviet futurism, German expressionism, French surrealism, and social realism. Film modernism also engaged with mainstream cinema and culture, often through selective appropriations that oscillated between satire and homage (James 1999; Suárez 2007). Particular titles often combined experimental form and popular reference: Maya Deren’s *Meshes of the Afternoon*, easily the most influential US modernist film, is equally indebted to surrealism, film noir, horror (James 2005: 176–80), and Buster Keaton (Clark *et al.* 1988: 113).

While alternative cinema often favoured formal exploration over politics, it occasionally channelled the perspectives of disenfranchised collectives, such as women, gays and lesbians, ethnic communities, and workers. Many experimental films fit the conventional definition of modernism as a self-reflexive art; others are ‘avant-garde’: they reject art as an elitist pursuit and seek to introduce it into the practice of everyday life (Bürger 1980: 47–54). Here, I take ‘modernism’ to include the ‘avant-garde’.

Despite such variation, modernist cinemas share some key elements, most importantly the attempt to enlarge the vocabulary and uses of film against Hollywood’s exclusive reliance on escapist storytelling. More fundamentally, all modern screen experiments aimed to develop a specifically cinematic visuality: contents and images that could only be expressed through moving pictures. Film’s specificity concerned critics associated with the modernist ‘little magazines’ of the 1910–20s and 1960s experimental film directors and advocates alike. Early critics, such as Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Coady, argued that cinema’s essence was movement and variations in shape and light, not plot and character (MacGowan 1916: 166; Coady 1916: 38). Nearly half a century later, underground filmmaker Jack Smith described the cinema as ‘a thing of light and shadows’ that ‘flicker[s] and shift[s]’ (Smith 1997 [1962–3]: 33), and Jonas Mekas, as ‘images, dreams, visions’ (Mekas 1972: 146). All rejected the narrative trappings that dominated the medium.

EARLY EXPERIMENTS: FACTUAL AND SUBJECTIVE MODES

Canadian and US modernist cinemas variously pursued cinematic visuality across historical stages. The 1920s films feature explorations of movement and texture as well as expressionism-influenced attempts to render psychological interiority. In the early 1930s there is a turn toward documentary and politics. The 1940s and 1950s are dominated by several styles of subjective cinema. In the 1960s, underground cinema’s pop sensibility coexists with structural film, especially after 1966. Rather than characterize these periods in chronological sequence,³ this chapter attempts to systematize the field in terms of persistent filmic modes.

Early US experimental film was characterized by two apparently opposite modes: ‘objectivism’ and ‘subjectivism’. Strand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta* exemplifies objectivism, whereas Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapich’s *The Life and Death of 9413: a Hollywood Extra* (1928) is an exponent of subjectivism. *Manhatta* combined urban actuality and the visual poem: footage of ferries, trains, skyscrapers, and urban crowds in Lower Manhattan was interspersed with intertitled quotations from Walt Whitman. *Manhatta* inaugurated the sub-genre of the ‘city film’ or ‘city symphony’, best represented in the European productions *Berlin* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929). Significant US examples are Robert Florey’s *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929), Robert Flaherty’s *Twenty-Four Dollar Island* (1925), Jay Leyda’s *A Bronx Morning* (1931), Rudy Burckhardt’s *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1940), and Marie Menken’s *Go! Go! Go!* (1964). *Manhatta* also foreshadowed a cinema of surface and graphic dynamism most ably practiced in the early 1930s by Ralph Steiner, a still photographer drawn to cinema. Steiner’s *H₂O* (1929), *Surf and Seaweed* (1930), and *Mechanical Principles* (1933) explore the textures of water and the movement of wooden machine models.

Vorkapich and Florey's *Life and Death of 9413: a Hollywood Extra* presents a very different aesthetic, expressionistically narrating an aspiring Hollywood actor's descent into anonymity, failure, and death. It strikingly uses cardboard and paper models, found footage, and simple spotlights. Its stylized décor and nightmarish intensity portrays the protagonist's subjective experience rather than his external circumstances. Contemporary critics saw it as derived from German expressionism, particularly *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), which communicated a madman's view of the world. The most interesting Caligari-indebted title of the time is James Sibley Watson, Jr. and Melville Webber's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928). It used prisms, high-contrast lighting, and superimpositions to convey the claustrophobia, gloomy spaces, and haunted characters of Edgar Allan Poe's story. Similarly focused on individual perception is Charles Vidor's *The Bridge* (also known as *The Spy*, 1929). Based on Ambrose Bierce's 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' (1890), it depicts the escape of a spy about to be hanged from a bridge, except the conclusion reveals that the escape was a reverie condensed in the last instants before the spy's death. Filmed outdoors in natural light, and combining point-of-view shots, soft-focus, and fleeting sights, it evokes French impressionism rather than German expressionism.

Both types of film pursue two modernist ambitions. City films and films of motion and pattern demonstrate an interest in surface and form also cultivated by some types of abstraction, machine aesthetics, and rationalist architecture and design. Contrarily, the subjectivist films of Florey, Watson and Webber, and Vidor exemplify a modernist concern with interiority, a concern more frequent in fiction and drama. The simultaneous attraction of exteriority-surface-mass and interiority-subjectivity-psychology is typically modern. Early in the twentieth century, German sociologist Georg Simmel had diagnosed that the modern 'overdevelopment' of 'the objective spirit' – cities, machinery, social institutions – prompted a concomitant withdrawal into the privacy of the self, and that the oscillation between the external-objective and internal-subjective worlds defined contemporary existence (Simmel 1950 [1903]: 409–24).

Most subsequent experimental film derives from the objectivist and subjectivist modes. Dance films, abstractions, and structural cinema arguably follow *Manhatta*'s and *H₂O*'s factuality, motility, and occasional formal play. The surreal and lyrical films of the 1940s and 1950s follow the 1920s subjectivist cinema. And the 'Mythopoetic cinema' of the 1950s and 1960s combines externality and interiority (Sitney 2002: 135–6).

OBJECTIVIST FILM: DANCES, ABSTRACTIONS, THE DOCUMENTARY IMPULSE

Different in many ways, dance films and abstractions sought to establish correspondences between optical forms and music, and explored rhythm, shape, and synesthesia. Both dance and abstraction converge in the work of Canadian Norman McLaren, a towering figure in abstract animation who also made dance films (*Pas de deux* 1968, *Narcissus*, 1983). His career stretches from the mid-1930s to the 1980s, but he produced some of his best-known abstractions, such as *Begone, Dull Care* (1949), and *Blinkity Blank* (1955), from 1940 to 1969. He used a broad range of

techniques: drawings, animated paper-cuts, and painting and scratching directly on the emulsion and soundtrack. McLaren directed the National Film Board of Canada's animation studio, mentoring younger animators such as George Dunning (of Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* fame) and Grant Munro. Another important early animator was American Mary Ellen Bute; her shapes and linear designs recall crucial European forerunners Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, and Oskar Fischinger, and align her with James and John Whitney, who contributed significantly to abstraction in the 1940s and 1950s. Bute's use of mathematical models to generate variations in light, shape, and colour foreshadows John Whitney's IBM-sponsored, computer-generated graphics of the 1960s and 1970s. Contrastingly, Harry Smith, Francis Lee, and Douglas Crockwell's designs evoke organic, unpredictably metamorphosing and quasi-hallucinatory forms. They anticipate 1960s animators Jordan Belson, James Whitney, and Storm de Hirsch, whose work absorbed New Age spirituality and psychedelia. Unique is Robert Breer (*fl.* 1950s–1970s), whose hand-drawn lines and daubs of colour compose fleetingly legible forms that constantly dissolve into flickering dots and scratches.⁴ Akin to Breer for her humour and the handcrafted look of her work is Marie Menken; she used pixelation to create abstract studies of rhythm and motion (*Copycat*, *Dwightiana*) and produced original observations of texture (*Glimpse of the Garden*, 1957, *Raindrops*, 1958–62), cities (*Excursion*, c.1968), and people (*Andy Warhol*, 1965).

Dance films pervade experimental film's evolution from the 1920s to the 1960s. Dudley Murphy's early *Soul of the Cypress* (1920) and Emlen Etting's *Oramunde* (1933) use the free form, gestural dance pioneered by Isadora Duncan to transmit stories. Similar narratives are James Broughton's *Four in the Afternoon* (1951), Deren's *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946), and Shirley Clarke's *A Moment of Love* (1957). Most dance films, however, relinquished narrative and concentrated on the camera's ability to register and restructure bodily motion. Sara Kathryn Arledge's *Introspection* (1946) employs superimpositions, extreme camera angles, slow motion, and wide-angle lenses to articulate movements otherwise unavailable to stage-bound spectators. Arledge remains obscure, but Maya Deren and Shirley Clarke were popular in experimental venues during the 1940s and 1950s. Deren's *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) and Clarke's *Dance in the Sun* (1953) extend movements across distant locations through their skillful use of graphic matches and matches on action. Deren's *Meditation on Violence* (1948) and Clarke's *Bullfight* (1955) and *In Paris Parks* (1954) showcase a broad range of motion – martial arts, bullfighting, children's games, incidental gestures – as dance. Anticipating 1960s minimalist dance's incorporation of quotidian movement, these films problematize the very category 'dance film'. From their perspective, Helen Levitt's *In the Street* (1953), usually considered a documentary, might be conceptualized as a dance film that observes passers-by and children playing in New York's streets to reveal in their movements the unconscious choreographies of daily life.

Though documentary is often excluded from experimental film histories, it can be regarded as a form of modernism, especially after the 1930s, when it was influenced by the formal innovations of Soviet montage. Examples of the fusion of factuality and advanced montage technique are documentaries John Grierson produced for the National Film Board of Canada in the 1940s, some made by European avant-gardists such as Joris Ivens and Boris Kaufman. Due to space constraints, and because

documentary is a distinct field, I do not discuss it here. Nonetheless, some experimental titles use documentary modes. Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* (1956), a loosely scripted portrayal of New York's skid row regulars, influenced independent Canadian and US cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Shirley Clarke's *The Connection* (1961) and *Portrait of Jason* (1967) blend fact and fiction to question traditional documentary's claim to truth (Rabinovitz 1991: 112–14, 136–9).

SUBJECTIVIST AND MYTHOPOETIC CINEMA

Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), which continued the 1920s subjectivist vein, is linked to the political documentary film culture ascendant in the 1930s; its cinematography and camera work were by Czech filmmaker Alexander Hammid, Deren's husband at the time, and collaborator of American documentarist Herbert Kline in *Crisis* (1939), *Lights Out in Europe* (1940), and *A Mexican Village* (1941). Nonetheless, *Meshes*' surrealism evokes Luis Buñuel and Jean Cocteau's early films, even if Deren later denied such influence. *Meshes* narrates a young woman's (played by Deren) dreams – or hallucinations – in which her home and environs become increasingly threatening. Eventually, she appears dead, wet, and seaweed-covered in the armchair where her dreams began. *At Land* (1944) is Deren's only other oneiric film; subsequent efforts are informed by dance, barring the posthumously assembled *Divine Horsemen* (1977), an ethnography of Haitian voodoo.

Deren's surreal turn influenced a generation of filmmakers – Kenneth Anger, James Broughton, Sidney Peterson, Gregory Markopoulos, and Curtis Harrington – and inaugurated the 'trance film', a significant mode in the 1940s and 1950s (Sitney 2002: 17–19). Anger's *Fireworks* (1947) is particularly important because of its artistry and Anger's subsequent prominence. Its open homoeroticism foreshadows a salient trend in post-war experimental cinema. Like *Meshes*, *Fireworks* is a dream film: a young man seeking erotic fulfillment is brutalized by a gang of sailors. The conclusion suggests that the violence may have been transformative: the film's protagonist lies in bed with another man; a statue, once broken, is now whole; and photographs of a brawny sailor carrying his mutilated body burn in the fireplace.

The 'trance' film borders on the lyrical film: a mode that 'postulates the film-maker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist of the film' (Sitney 2002: 160). Both trance and lyrical films suspend spatial and temporal continuity, but in the lyrical film the resulting uncertainty and distortion appear as subjective visions rather than dreams or delusions. Additionally, lyrical films replace trance films' deep staging with a painterly flat space, and narrative development with disconnected impressions. Diary films such as Jonas Mekas's *Walden* (1969) or *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1974) could be considered varieties of the lyrical film. Ostensibly factual, they are personal records filtered by the filmmaker's sensibility; their tentative voice-overs, extremely brief takes, and roving camerawork communicate the precariousness of memory and fleetingness of experience.

Most notable in the lyrical mode, and globally influential, is Stan Brakhage, whose prolific output also includes stark factualities (*The Art of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, 1971, a detached portrayal of autopsies), diary films, abstractions, city films, and political meditations (*23 Psalm Branch: Part I*, 1967). All uncompromisingly pursue an untutored eye unbiased by traditional laws of perspective or by the

conceptual grid language imposes on perception. In this pursuit, Brakhage has stained and scratched the celluloid; degraded the emulsion; painted on film; and glued leaves, petals, and insects on editing tape and run it through the optical printer, as he did in *Mothlight* (1963) and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1981).

One of Brakhage's peaks is *Dog Star Man* (1963), a highly abstract feature-length allegory of human striving and spiritual aspiration, and an exemplar of the 'mythopoetic' mode: film that contributes to 'the making of a new myth or the reinterpretation of an old one' (Sitney 2002: 136). Mythopoetic film falls between objectivist and subjectivist cinema: it explores a materially embodied trans-subjective imaginary – myth – and is thus outer-oriented, but its terms are often subjective. Myth is an enduring concern among US experimental filmmakers, from Alla Nazimova and Charles Bryant's *Salomé* (1923) and Melville Watson and James S. Webber's *Lot in Sodom* (1933) to Brakhage, Bruce Baillie (*Quixote*, 1965), and Charles Henri Ford (*Johnny Minotaur*, 1971). Perhaps the most assiduous mythopoetic filmmaker was Gregory Markopoulos, whose stylized, hermetic work takes Greek mythology as its main frame of reference.

BEYOND MODERNISM? POP, UNDERGROUND, STRUCTURAL FILM

The early 1960s signal the culmination of film modernism: established figures such as Anger, Brakhage, and Markopoulos made some of their best work, and a new generation emerged, working in a great variety of modes and styles initiated in previous decades. At the same time, the 1960s bring about a new sensibility. The 'underground' and 'New American' cinema⁵ shifted their focus from artistic cultures to urban subcultures, particularly beatniks and queers. Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (1959) and John Cassavettes's *Shadows* (1959) captured the language and ethos of the beat subculture. Other titles showed a joyous polymorphous perversity rife with homoerotic iconography and camp affect: Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963), the Kuchar brothers' parodies of Hollywood pictures, Barbara Rubin's polysexual *Christmas on Earth* (1963), and Andy Warhol's 1960s output. While social and sexual unconventionality had always informed alternative cinemas, the 1960s underground's unapologetic explicitness was unprecedented, giving experimental film a scandalous aura and occasionally prompting prosecution.

Even if the underground focused on contemporary 'deviant' subcultures – as sociologists called them – it also resonated with contemporary pop art. Much of it is fascinated with popular culture: fashion, rock, drugs, and classical Hollywood, whose stars and styles inspired Warhol, Jack Smith, and the Kuchars. Others inquired into mass media ideology and motifs: Stan Vanderbeek's and Arthur Lipsett's collage films, and Bruce Conner's *A MOVIE* (1958) expose mass culture's mixture of affective intensity, grotesqueness, and violence.

The chief antecedent to 1960s pop film is Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936), which dreamily reassembles a commercial Hollywood film without concern for narrative continuity. Cornell's film was produced when the line between commercial and experimental media could still be somewhat surely drawn. However, the 1960s underground developed when the avant-garde embraced mass culture, just as the

culture industry assimilated avant-garde innovations: categories that had contributed to modernism's self-definition diluted.

Moreover, institutionalization, video, and cross-media works also eroded cinematic modernism. After decades of subsistence on the edges of the industry and cultural institutions, film modernism was by the late 1960s entrenched in universities, art centres, and museums. From 1965 on, video contested the cinema's dominance of moving image experimentation. And throughout the 1960s, cinema combined with performance, installation art, and other media, losing its self-contained quality (Youngblood 1970). Consequently, the 1960s might be considered a transition into a different regime of the moving image often called postmodernism.

These developments coexist with the rise of 'Structural Cinema' (Sitney 1970). The filmic counterpart to minimalism and conceptual art, structural cinema investigated filmic materials and constraints (frame, film grain, montage, the effect of light on the emulsion), highlighted tensions between the flatness of the screen and three-dimensional illusion, and revived early modernism's abstraction and formal research. It was the closest film came to Clement Greenberg's standard definition of modernism: an art that takes its materials and means of representation as its main subject (Greenberg 1960 [1939]: 1–21).

Two important examples of structural film are Canadian Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) and Ken Jacobs's *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969). *Wavelength* splices zoom shots that range from a general view of a loft to an extreme close-up of a photograph of a wavy water surface pinned on a wall. People enter and leave the space and a man collapses, but the frame passes them as it moves toward its objective, accompanied by a rising sine wave in the soundtrack. Anti-illusionistic strategies punctuate the advance: changes from positive to negative, frame adjustments, brief superimpositions and inversions, and colour gels placed in front of the lens. Finally, the frame rests on a photograph that flattens the optical field and whose waves refer to the film's title. *Wavelength* then shifts from three to two dimensions, from motion to stasis, and from image to language, examining and liquidating its means of representation. Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* re-photographs a three-minute reel from 1905, stopping and looping the film, expanding the image, and hovering over its surface. These strategies uncover textural complexities that otherwise pass unnoticed, reducing the image to its material base – swarming dots – and evoking its potential infinity.

These are just two ways structuralism set off the pop devotions and subcultural alliances of the underground with early modernist formal investigations (one could see Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* as pointillism redux, for example). Yet for all their austerity, these explorations remain in the orbit of the popular. Jacobs works with another era's pop artifact; *Wavelength* includes a fragment of a Beatles song and insinuations of film noir. In itself, pop reference does not make these works postmodern since early modernism was fascinated with vernacular culture, but Snow's and Jacobs' films are not mere continuations of modernism, since they appear in a media ecology that differs vastly from that of earlier decades. Ultimately, these difficulties of labelling evince the diversity of modernism and modernist cinema, whose richness and complexity often baffle all attempts to classify and make full sense of them.

NOTES

1. For a panoramic discussion of the early avant-garde and its terminology, see Horak (1995: 14–66).
2. Jacobs (1974 [1947–8]: 545), Curtis (1971: 39), and Horak (1995: 31) have fixed on *Manhatta* as the inaugural US avant-garde film, an idea recently nuanced by Moritz (1995: 121–22).
3. See, for example, Sanger (1976) and Sitney (2002).
4. For comprehensive treatments of abstract cinema and experimental animation (not identical but overlapping fields), see Sitney (2002: 231–92) and Russett and Starr (1976).
5. They are not exactly the same. See Suárez (1996: 73–81).

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CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

EMBODIED MODERNISM

Dance in Canada and the United States



Allana C. Lindgren

‘The term “modern” dance is obviously an inadequate one’, John Martin, *The New York Times*’ dance critic, declared in his 1933 book *The Modern Dance* (Martin 1933: 3). According to Martin, the label – ‘a blanket word which has succeeded in making itself equally offensive in all the arts’ – was doomed to lose its descriptive accuracy the instant the choreography it described was supplanted by subsequent innovations (3). Despite this reservation, Martin attached the phrase to a diverse range of concert dance choreographers and performers, including Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm – known as the Big Four because of their prominence and leadership within the New York modern dance community. In so doing, Martin constructed a chartable timeline and genealogy, which granted artists associated with this genre passage into the broader realm of aesthetic modernism.

Yet, Martin’s delineation does not represent the phrase’s full presence within dance. Following the new modernist studies project to recalibrate modernism, this chapter not only broaches standard modern dance narratives, but also explores the elasticity of the word ‘modern’. In this way it is possible to move beyond the high art ethos of concert dance to query how popular and social dance related to modernization. Furthermore, although New York was the centre for dance experimentation outside of Europe, addressing events in other cities in the United States and Canada allows for a more nuanced understanding of how ideas about the modern have been shaped by the specificities of local and national contexts.

Even before Martin adopted the term ‘modern’, the word resonated within social dance communities. In *The Modern Dance Tutor; or, Society Dancing* (1878), John Freeman Davis, a Toronto dance teacher and composer, framed his description of the ‘latest fashionable dances’ (1878: iii), including the Rockaways and the Triune Glide, with lessons in decorum – a strategy perhaps designed to defend against allegations articulated in anti-dance tracts like W.C. Wilkinson’s *The Dance of Modern Society* (1869), which denounced contemporary ballroom dances and their ‘rythmic [*sic*] gyrations’ (23) as ‘immoral amusement’ (57) that transgressed Victorian mores.

Early progenitors of modern dance on the concert stage also had to counter moral suspicion. Many did so by positioning their performances as serious art. In 1899

Isadora Duncan left the United States for London and audiences who were more receptive to her ‘natural’ barefooted performances and her belief that dancing to symphonic scores did not debase music. Her interpretations of ancient Greek aesthetics echoed the Greek statuary posing exercises Genevieve Stebbins incorporated into American Delsartism (Ruyter 1973: 429), suggesting that modernism did not always signal ruptures with the past, but could assert imagined continuities that served to validate and socially elevate. Ruth St Denis, another American, attempted to distance concert dance from the populist vaudeville stages where she had spent her early career by creating dances, including *Radha* (1906), inspired by Eastern cultures and religions. While the orientalism of these and other choreographic works performed by Denishawn, the Los Angeles-based company founded by St Denis and her husband, Ted Shawn, made performances commercially viable, the creative impetus was sincere devotion to the perceived sacredness of interpretive dance.

The following generation, with the help of champions like Martin, secured the legitimacy of modern dance. Numerous choreographers codified movement techniques and established companies. The former trend indicated that modern dance required dedicated effort before expertise could be achieved while the latter bestowed institutional gravitas on the art form. Graham, for instance, established the Martha Graham Dance Company, and developed her own technique that was attentive to the influence breathing exerted on the body. Exhalation and inhalation were accentuated as contraction and release, which allowed her to build a corporeal lexicon and aesthetic that followed the natural rhythms of the body. After reading Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, Humphrey, co-founder of the Humphrey-Weidman Company with Weidman and Pauline Lawrence, transposed the concepts of the Dionysian and the Apollonian into a movement theory exploring the loss and restoration of equilibrium in her ‘fall and recovery’ technique. Katherine Dunham, a trained anthropologist as well as a choreographer and dancer, created a company and the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research. She also developed the Dunham Technique, which was based on Caribbean and African influences blended with ballet. While codification and institutionalization might appear oppositional to experimentation, personal kinetic languages and stable company environments helped to foster choreographers’ styles. These initiatives’ influence often extended beyond localized contexts. Graham’s technique, for example, initially served as the foundation for the Toronto Dance Theatre (founded by Patricia Beatty, David Earle, and Peter Randazzo in 1968).

The Second World War intensified the transnational dissemination of ideas and influence. Elizabeth Leese – born in Denmark, but raised in Germany – arrived in Canada in 1939. Classes at her school in Montréal were informed by her training at the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance in England as well as her time as a performer with Trudi Schoop in Switzerland. Ruth Sorel, who studied and performed with Mary Wigman during the 1920s, and Birouté Nagys, who trained with Rosalia Chladek in Vienna, taught modern dance in Montréal and Toronto rooted in *Ausdruckstanz*, the German dance movement led by Rudolf Laban and Wigman, and known in English by a variety of names, including ‘expressionist dance’ and ‘absolute dance’.

Holm, a protégée and former dancer for Wigman in Germany, became Wigman’s representative in the United States in 1931 when she established an *Ausdruckstanz* school in New York. Holm directed an all-woman company from 1936 until 1944,

and was applauded as a choreographer (Martin deemed her ensemble piece, *Trend*, the best new dance composition of 1937). As a pedagogue, she adapted *Ausdruckstanz* ideas to an American context, using structured improvisations to teach movement principles and choreography. She also contributed to modern dance's emphasis on individuality by helping students – including Alwin Nikolais, founder of the Nikolais Dance Theater – to explore their own individual movement preferences.

In addition to the celebration of individuality, the use of movement to convey emotion was another key marker of modern dance. For instance, in Graham's *Lamentation* (1930), the dancer wears a long jersey tube, which covers her hair and extends down to her ankles. Sitting on a bench, her feet in a wide second position, she swings rigidly from side to side. Her clasped hands circle in front of her – a brief pose of supplication collapses into desolation and a stark materialization of grief.



Figure 57.1 Martha Graham in *Lamentation*. Photographer: Soichi Sunami.
Library of Congress Music Division.

In ‘La danse et l’espoir’, which was included in the Montréal Automatists’ manifesto, *Refus global* (1948), Françoise Sullivan passionately advocated for the use of movement as a conduit for emotion. In her solo *Dédale* (1948), she tests this theory. Unaccompanied except for her breath and ambient sounds, the performer uses the momentum of the swing movement, which begins as a simple wrist curl before intensifying in speed and force to hurl her through space. *Dédale*’s emotional power is generated solely through the choreography’s effect on the performer as she gasps for air in the piece’s brief moments of repose.

Demonstrating the restlessness of modern dance, as early as the 1950s, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor began moving away from emotion. Both had been in Graham’s company and their rebellions against the intense emotionalism of her character-driven works contributed to the dominance of formalist experiments in their choreography. Cunningham and his longstanding artistic and personal partner, John Cage, incorporated chance and indeterminacy into their collaborations, which assisted in detaching dance from the realm of emotion. In *Sixteen Dances* (1951), Cunningham tossed coins to determine the order of movement sequences, rendering artistic decision-making impersonal and objective (Copeland 2004: 71). Furthermore, dance, music, costumes, and sets remained autonomous, often not coming together until the dress rehearsal or opening night. Thus, aesthetic parallels and contrasts occurred spontaneously. Taylor’s objectivist choreography similarly privileged kinetic exploration over emotion. The results were provocative. When Taylor, inspired by John Cage’s 4’33”, created the motionless *Duet* (1957), Louis Horst responded with a review in *Dance Observer* that noted the date and place of the performance. The rest of the page was blank.

Countering charges of elitism against modern dance’s more esoteric expressions, some performers excelled at combining movement with plot and characterization. Most notably, Weidman’s kinetic pantomime facilitated danced vignettes. His *On My Mother’s Side* (1940) and *Daddy was a Fireman* (1943) used everyday gestures in autobiographical portraits that conveyed recognizable character types.

Ballet contributed to modernist dynamism in 1948 when George Balanchine, a choreographer who had worked for the Ballets Russes, co-founded the New York City Ballet with the US writer and impresario Lincoln Kirstein. Balanchine modernized ballet technique, developing his own neo-classicism, which he often set to the music of modernist composers, especially Igor Stravinsky. Balanchine preferred unadorned costumes and plotless choreography that stretched ballet precepts to the point of distortion. In works like *Agon* (1957), the dancers wear simple leotards and tights. The spine’s malleability is tested with twisting movements that disrupt the verticality of the torso and involve off-centre balances. His choreography also often featured turned-in knees and feet. The softness of rounded ballet port de bras became angular. The physical demands of his works were frequently performed at impossibly fast tempi. In short, Balanchine’s neo-classicism redefined virtuosity.

Modern dance did not just exist in the studio and on the stage. Although corporeality might seem antithetical to the Machine Age, dance had a reciprocally productive relationship with new technologies. Early motion picture innovators often featured dancers in their films. For instance, in 1894 Thomas Edison recorded Ruth Dennis (aka Ruth St Denis) as she performed a skirt dance. Dance was the perfect cinematic subject as it dynamically demonstrated the new medium’s ability

to transform still photography into real-time motion. Simultaneously, film served as an archivist for dance, preserving the otherwise ephemeral art form. *The Dances of the Ages* (1913) explored special effects with dance as Ted Shawn and Norma Gould performed in miniature on a banquet table surrounded by life-size guests. Later experimental filmmakers functioned as choreographers, creating dances that could exist only on celluloid. In *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945), Maya Deren collaborated with dancer Talley Beatty, playing with cuts that jumped from location to location and camera angles that provided perspectives not possible in traditional performance settings. The National Film Board of Canada's Norman McLaren became known for his dance films such as *Pas de deux* (1968) in which he used an optical printer to expose each frame multiple times, creating a stroboscopic afterlife of dancers' gestures. In addition, dance was often used in films and early television to convey fantasized modernities. In *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), Ginger Rogers sang 'We're in the Money' as chorus girls, clad in strategically placed coins, performed Busby Berkeley's choreography – an optimistic assertion that glamour would overcome the Depression. In 1954, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's television variety programme, *Bamboula*, normalized harmonious interracial relations as a multicultural group of performers professed their love and hopes through song and dance. In short, while dance might have disrupted film and television's realism, it supplied opportunities to imagine new social possibilities.

Clearly, modern dance was not just about artistic innovation. Through dance it was possible to engage with topical issues, construct new identities, and convey ideological allegiances. Some educational institutions, for instance, were interested in the social efficacy of movement. Opening the School of Expression in Toronto in 1901, Emma Scott Raff included physical culture courses under the motto 'A Sound Mind in a Sound Body' (Warner 1995: 49). Margaret H'Doubler, who studied under John Dewey, taught at the University of Wisconsin, which in 1926 became the first university to offer a degree in dance. In *Dance: A Creative Art Experience* (1940), H'Doubler emphasized that 'education should be a building toward the integration of human capacities and powers resulting in well-adjusted, useful, balanced individuals' (H'Doubler 1957 [1940]: 60). Dance was the perfect means to achieve these goals: 'It serves all the ends of individual growth; it helps to develop the body; it stimulates the imagination and challenges the intellect; it helps to cultivate an appreciation for beauty; and it deepens and refines the emotional nature' (64).

Modern dance was also an arena for female agency. The leadership and influence of Martha Hill and Mary Jo Shelley made the Bennington School of Dance, which was founded at Bennington College in 1934, an important hub for modern dance, nurturing choreographers and the mostly female student participants. The Neo-Dance Theatre (renamed New Dance Theatre) was founded in Toronto in 1949 by Cynthia Barrett and Nancy Lima Dent. Yoné Kvietyts and Birouté Nagys created the Montreal Modern Dance Company in 1952. Nancy Lima Dent, Ruth (Tutti) Lau and Bianca Rogge established the Contemporary Choreographers of Toronto in 1960. Françoise Riopelle and Jeanne Renaud – both associated with the Automatists – established L'École de danse moderne de Montréal in 1961. In 1966, Renaud launched her own company, Le Groupe de la Place Royale. A few years later in 1972, Martine Époque established Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire in Montréal. Although many

of these ventures were short-lived, they demonstrated women's ability to establish and lead cultural institutions.

Dance reflected the twentieth century's changing ideals of femininity onstage, and helped to generate and circulate visual images of modern women. In her early works Graham favoured angular and austere movements – cupped hands, flexed feet – suggesting a new gendered physicality that embraced strong movement and rejected traditional definitions of female beauty. She also created psychologically rich female roles. In *Night Journey* (1947), she depicts an elderly Jocasta reluctantly reflecting on her life. Humphrey also created complex women. In *With My Red Fires* (1936), the Matriarch's cloying and manipulative affection, aimed at the Young Woman, creates a complex power imbalance between two women. While this relationship can be interpreted in more general terms as an exploration of domination, the dancers' corporeality makes gender central to the equation. Rachel Browne, who founded Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers in 1964, was also known for her women-centred choreography that responded artistically to second-wave feminism. In *The Woman I Am* (1975), she depicts women as jubilant, vulnerable, and defiant as they dance to spoken poetry exploring love, loss, and ageing from female perspectives.

The prejudice that male dancers faced during the nineteenth century intensified with the ascendancy of Vaslav Nijinsky and continued to hound modern dance innovators. To counter this discrimination, after he left Denishawn and his marriage to St Denis, Shawn dedicated himself to legitimizing dance for men. He recruited young male college athletes and founded a school and a company, Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, which were based at Jacob's Pillow, a Massachusetts farm. Shawn choreographed works with titles like *Labor Symphony* (1934) that alluded to traditionally masculine physical work (Foulkes 2002: 92). Influenced by Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis – writers who celebrated and spiritually elevated male relationships – Shawn's version of homosexual masculinity rejected effeminate stereotypes (85). Instead, the beauty of the male body was defined by a sculpted athleticism – an aesthetic that emulated ancient Athenian ideals.

Heterosexual masculinity was expressed in more competitive terms in tap dance as the public personas of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly offered contrasting versions: the debonair gentleman Astaire played in movies like *Top Hat* (1935), whose refined and buoyant dancing paralleled his characters' personalities; conversely, Kelly's dancing in films such as *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) was athletic and grounded. Despite these differences, the heteronormativity of both was always confirmed through dance numbers with female partners.

Dancing bodies were also a flashpoint for racial politics. Ragtime rhythms, with their bouncy syncopation, attracted young white Americans in the 1890s and exploded into a nationwide obsession. White critics condemned the music as addictive and primitive, with the 'animal' dances of the 1910s being particularly provocative. According to dance historian Nadine George-Graves, these ragtime dances allowed couples to test the limits of public propriety (2009: 61). The Bunny Hug, for instance, 'was a simulation of rabbits fornicating, with rapid hopping, shaking, grinding, and wiggling' (61). White professional ballroom dancers Vernon and Irene Castle 'polished' African-American and working-class social dances, but also denounced the more titillating dances. In *Modern Dancing* (1914) and during performances, their

emphasis on verticality and formality made their revisions fashionable among more conservative white middle- and upper-classes.

Jazz music was a contentious topic among proponents of the New Negro Movement. Some were ambivalent towards jazz's populist appeal or equated it with louche culture. Yet it and the dance styles that developed in tandem demonstrated the range of artistic brilliance that could be claimed as part of the Talented Tenth and proved that the arts are a meritocracy. By the late 1920s, tap dancing was becoming 'the most rhythmically complex "cream" of jazz dancing' thanks to virtuoso performers such as Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, whose polyrhythmic dancing, staccato attacks, wing steps, crossovers, cramps, shuffle offs, and interpretation of the shim sham shimmy signalled a vitality well suited to the United States (Hill 2010: 88). Fayard and Harold Nicholas, better known as the Nicholas Brothers, similarly astounded in the movie *Stormy Weather* (1943). Accompanied by 'Jumpin' Jive' and elegantly dressed in tailcoats, the brothers bounded from table to table, tapping in perfect unison and landing in splits as they leap-frogged down a gigantic staircase.

Several African-American dancers performed on concert stages, asserting their presence in a traditionally white domain. Edna Guy, Hemsley Winfield, Alison Burroughs, and Charles Williams were all part of the New Negro Movement. Asadata Dafora's *Kykunkor* (1931) was the first dance-drama to use African dance, music, language and performers to present Africanist influences on the concert stage. Dunham's company toured the United States in works like *Tropical Revue* (1943–5), *Carib Song* (1945), and *Bal Negre* (1946), introducing audiences to the religious and popular dances of the cultures Dunham had encountered during her anthropological fieldwork. Trinidad-born Pearl Primus studied dance in Africa, subsequently creating several diasporic dances, including *Fanga* (1949), a Liberian-influenced dance of welcome. Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* (1960), inspired by Ailey's childhood memories and set to blues and spiritual music, became emblematic of African-American resilience and optimism.

Some white artists like Lester Horton in Los Angeles and Franziska Boas in New York established interracial schools and companies during the 1930s. The line between activism and exploitation for many white modernist choreographers, however, was often complicated. For instance, in 1936, Toronto teacher Boris Volkoff and his dancers represented Canada at the *Internationale Tanzwettspiele*, which was associated with the Berlin Olympics. Two of the dances the group performed were *Mala* and *Mon-Ka-Ta*. In both of these works Volkoff theatricalized indigeneity, co-opting aboriginal narratives, iconography, and dance customs, which he presented as Canadian culture. This kind of appropriation, often intended as homage, suggests a primitivist understanding of a pan-Indigeneity fixed in a pre-industrialized state that rendered aboriginals ahistorical and malleable.

Beyond their involvement with identity politics, modern dancers in Canada and the United States responded to other timely issues. In 1932 the Workers Dance League (later renamed the New Dance League) was founded to support the activities of workers' dance groups that rallied around the motto 'Dance is a Weapon in the Revolutionary Class Struggle'. One of the affiliate organizations was the New Dance Group (NDG) – a school and performance collective in New York. The three-hour NDG classes often ended with discussions about leftist politics and revolutionary texts (Graff 1997: 55). NDG members' choreographic works extended beyond



Figure 57.2 Pauline Sullivan in Boris Volkoff's *Mala*. Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse (www.dcd.ca).

strictly class-based issues to address other Popular Front concerns. Sophie Maslow's *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1941), set to Woody Guthrie songs, depicts the fortitude of rural people during the Depression. Edith Segal's *Southern Holiday* (1933) decries lynching while Jane Dudley's *Harmonica Breakdown* (1941) promotes the music of Sonny Terry, a poor, blind, African-American musician. Anna Sokolow's *Kaddish* (1945), created shortly after the Holocaust, was inspired by Jewish mourning rituals.

Canadian choreographers were similarly politically motivated. In works like *Hunger* (1935), Saida Gerrard articulated her empathy for society's downtrodden. Cynthia Barrett's *Child Refugee: I Don't See No Butterflies* (1944), an elegy for the

victims of concentration camps, and *Set Your Clock at U235* (1946), Nancy Lima Dent's condemnation of atomic weapons, both demonstrated modern dance's activist impulse to memorialize and critique.

When the Roosevelt government created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935 as part of its New Deal programmes, dance activities were initially produced under the aegis of the Federal Theatre Project before the short-lived Federal Dance Project (1936–7) was established. The most successful production was Helen Tamiris's *How Long Brethren* (1937), a recounting of discrimination against African Americans set to *Negro Songs of Protest* and featuring the Federal Negro Chorus with twenty white female dancers. The choreography, defined by the performers' slow, oscillating rhythms, low-weighted centres of gravity, and heavy feet, modulated to bold determination marked by sharp elbows and strong, elevated legs bent at the knee (Foulkes 2002: 140–1). While Tamiris's progressive racial politics are not disputed, dance historians have noted the paradox of 'casting white dancers to protest racism' and the resulting 'metaphorical minstrelsy' (Manning 2004: 103, 101).

Dance also functioned as an outlet for nationalism, asserting perceived or desired values. Graham's *American Document* (1938), an anti-fascist work, represented moments from American history, incorporating spoken excerpts from texts such as the Declaration of Independence to contextualize the movement as the Second World War loomed and patriotic sentiment swelled. With the Cold War, the overtly leftist spirit of modern dance receded. Political choreography was still produced, particularly work that repudiated racism, but revolutionary calls to make art that was 'Of, By, and For the People' became precarious in the age of McCarthyism. Instead, dance artists such as José Limón were recruited as agents of cultural diplomacy when the US government implemented its international exchange programme to promote American interests, culture, and values, and to foster goodwill.

Modern dance's dominance began to wane in the early 1960s. Artists associated with the Judson Dance Theater explored quotidian movement and developed contact improvisation, which rejected set choreography in favour of spontaneity. Lawrence and Miriam Adams, former dancers with the National Ballet of Canada, opened 15 Dance Lab in 1972. Interested in demonstrating dancers' agency after their experiences in the rigid hierarchy of a ballet company, they welcomed a mélange of styles, including bharatanatyam and performance art. Although the revolutionary spirit of these innovations appears modernist, the high art connotations of concert dance repelled, necessitating the ideological and nomenclatural resistance provided by the term 'postmodern'.

Martin could not have predicted the vast diversity of dance experiments that have pulsed with modernist energy, yet his words remain a valuable touchstone. In 1939, still pondering the contours of modern dance, he wrote that 'modernism in the large sense is that tendency in any period which first senses and makes tangible the new directions of its time before they have become an accepted part of daily life' (Martin 1965 [1939]: 126). Dancers participated in this process by performing aesthetic and socio-political change onstage and off. As a result, their contributions serve as a reminder that modernism has an embodied history.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

MODERNIST LITERATURE IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

—♦—
Gregory Betts

Canadian and American modernist literature begins in Paris, France, where artists from around the world congregated en masse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to address, contest, and even attempt to direct the changes precipitated by the arrival of modernity. Paris embodied the cutting edge of these forces. The black metal Eiffel Tower, the world's largest structure when it was finished in 1889, symbolized the arrival of a new era, while such established nineteenth-century authors as Guy de Maupassant contested the 'giddy, ridiculous tower' for heralding a 'ghastly dream' (Harvie 2006: 95). Today, we call that ghastly dream modernism itself, and many of its distinctly urban, disjunctive, and geometrical features are anticipated in the tower. In *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), American novelist and poet Gertrude Stein, who pioneered adapting geometrical cubist painting methods to literature, used the Eiffel Tower as a metaphor for the oil wells she witnessed from Oklahoma to Texas to California. Her book reviews the first wave of modernist literary production in the United States and explores the quintessentially modernist theme of the paradox of individual isolation and alienation in an age of mass-communication and transit: 'since the earth is all covered over with every one there is really no relation between any one' (Stein 1937: 99).

Like the oil wells across the Canadian and American prairies Stein discusses in *Everybody's Autobiography*, the harsh metallic Eiffel Tower cutting into the low-lying streets of Paris symbolizes a break between new modernist technologies and the natural landscape, between people and their environment, and for some even the conquest of humanity over nature. Canadian and American modernist writers embraced this break and studied this dissociation. A group of artists and writers associated with American poet Ezra Pound and American/British poet and critic T.S. Eliot even began identifying themselves as a 'Cult of Ugliness' (Pound 1935: 45). Their writing was filled with violent and jarring imagery and marked by complex stylistic features such as collage, bricolage, and fragmentation. 'Civilization's going to pieces' wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925 at the start of his most celebrated novel, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald 1991 [1925]: 14). Despite the pervasive bleakness, optimism still inheres beneath the despair as the violence and existential alienation depicted in these modernist works performs a cleansing ritual. *Gatsby*, for instance,

by the end still believes in ‘the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us [...] tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther’ (Fitzgerald 1991 [1925]: 141). Pound’s friend, the British/Canadian novelist and painter Wyndham Lewis, however, argued that in truth artists react more passively to the signals of cultural change. After major upheavals, such as those provoked by technological shifts, ‘there is a period of stunned dreariness; then people begin, antlike, the building of a new human world’ (Lewis 1926: 336). For Lewis, a better role for the modernist writer was to revivify the stunned masses’ senses and help people to understand their experience of the transformations.

For many Canadian and American writers at the outset of modernism, both countries did not prove to be productive environments for addressing the possibilities of modernity or revivifying their senses. Both places, for different reasons, felt too resistant to modernity, too naively nationalist or traditionalist, to permit the kind of literary experimentation necessary to grapple with the changes afoot. Canada’s avant-garde novelist and painter Bertram Brooker protested such conditions directly:

We have welcomed new architectural forms like the grain elevator and the skyscraper. But in the arts where form is divorced from mechanics – notably in literature and painting – we permit ourselves to be greatly disturbed by ingenuity, originality, and the invention of new contrivances, new moods, new modes.

(2009 [1929]: 198)

The conditions Brooker describes drove an exodus of many of the most prominent Canadian and American authors to Europe. Ezra Pound moved to London in 1909, then Paris in 1921. T.S. Eliot moved to Paris in 1910, then London in 1914. H.D. moved to London permanently in 1911. After the First World War, another group – including Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and Canadians such as Morley Callaghan, John Glassco, and Brion Gysin – relocated to Paris. In Paris, after all, America’s best precedent for modernism, Edgar Allen Poe, was first recognized as important. This group of exiles famously became known by Stein’s label: ‘You are all a lost generation.’ The line was used as an epigraph to Hemingway’s 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*, depicting the expatriate literary community in Paris fretting about their existential rootlessness. ‘Cheer up’, his protagonist says: ‘All countries look just like the moving pictures’ (Hemingway 1926: 18).

Canadian and American modernity amplified many of the shocks produced by radical innovations in Victorian thought and culture. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution (c.1859) implied that the Bible was not literally true; Karl Marx’s economic theories introduced the disruptive notions of class mobility and workers’ rights to own their labour; the American Civil War and end of slavery all but shattered that nation; and the women’s suffrage movement posed further threats to traditional gender roles. Communist revolutions in Paris (1871), Russia (1917), Germany (1918), Bavaria (1919), and Hungary (1919) marked the emergence of a new kind of political struggle, as did the First World War. Simultaneously, technological advances including mass media, industrialized warfare, and mass transportation altered fundamental conceptions of time and space.

All of these changes affected Canadian and American modernist literature and created an atmosphere charged with the spirit of revolution. Everything about

literature began to shift, including writers' relationships to the page and how words were arranged upon it. American poet E.E. Cummings took up Parisian Stéphane Mallarmé's experiments with the typographic placement of words on the page and began organizing his writing to maximize visual effect. Pound challenged writers to 'make it new' (Pound 1934), to enhance the intensity of modern experience. Such an embrace of futurity rather than a defence of the past is characteristic of modernist literature. Eliot wrestled with Mallarmé's notion that culture is superficial and random, and with his proposition that language creates reality, partly because of humanity's willful blindness to greater realities. Similarly, in 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', American poet Wallace Stevens wrote that nature had 'expelled us and our images' and we had now to reinvent the world through imagination (Stevens 1997 [1942]: 329).

This reinvention was already happening with technology. Consider electricity: at the end of the nineteenth century, for the first time city streets were suddenly awash in electric light. The spectacle was, in Stevens' words, 'tragedy's most moving face' (Stevens 1990: 477). Inventions from radio to cinema quickly followed, and the Eiffel Tower itself was transformed in 1909 to broadcast wireless radio transmissions. The electric elevator, invented in 1880, allowed buildings to grow taller and the skyscraper, which would become Canada's and America's iconic architecture, was born. Lit up like enormous torches as if in defiance of the stars, these skyscrapers captured, for many modernists, the hubris of human civilization; or in the anthropomorphic imagery of American poet Carl Sandburg, 'One by one lights of a skyscraper fling their checkering cross work on the velvet gown of night' (Sandburg 1970: 265). In 1890, electric subways were first commissioned and tunnels were swiftly built in all major cities. Daily life, especially in cities, was suddenly electrified from underground to above the clouds. Canadian and American modernism is, accordingly, intimately connected to such monumental and distinctly urban transformations. By 1942, in a poem meditating on the world at war, Canadian poet Earl Birney used electric light as the symbol of human accomplishment and its fragility: 'We are a spark beleaguered/by darkness' (Birney 2010 [1942]: 126).

Literature had to change. As Brooker argued,

Books like those of Henry James, George Meredith and Joseph Conrad simply cannot be written by a man who has just breakfasted with an electric toaster at his elbow and whose morning meditation in the garden has been disturbed by ukulele-music trickling out of the sky.

(2009 [1929]: 197)

Brooker's prose, especially his award-winning *Think of the Earth* (1936), catalogues the impact of the new electrified environment even in rural Canada. By mid-century, Marshall McLuhan had developed the influential view that electricity was the most important technological development since the printing press. A new kind of human consciousness had begun to emerge in the 'electric age', he argued (McLuhan 1962: 1). The question was, how should books be written now that ignoring modernity was no longer a choice?

In England before the First World War, Ezra Pound had already helped to pioneer an important way forward for literature in the electric era. He fell in with writers

including British poets T.E. Hulme, F.S. Flint, and Edward Storer, who shared an interest in French symbolist poetry and *vers libre* (free verse). Calling themselves the Eiffel Tower Group, they met regularly between 1907 and 1909 at the bohemian Eiffel Tower restaurant in London to develop an image-centric writing. They were unified by disdain for Victorian writing's baroque ornamentation and sentimentalism. Hulme's travels in the stark Canadian prairies drove him to develop the stripped down literary language that became a hallmark of the group's aesthetics (Flint 1915: 2): 'absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage' (71). Their most famous poem was Pound's two-line 'In a Station of the Metro' that depicts the crowds in the Paris subway as alienated apparitions. Pound eventually renamed the group Imagists, by which name they remain most widely known.

In America, imagist verse was the first distinctly modernist form writers widely embraced; opportunities for publishing such work expanded rapidly in the second decade of the century. Harriet Monroe founded *Poetry* magazine in 1912 in Chicago, and invited Pound to serve as a foreign editor. It was a vital forum for modernist literature in America. Pound quickly rounded up imagistic work by American poet H.D. and Briton Richard Aldington for *Poetry*'s first issue. Successive issues expanded the imagist focus, including Pound's manifestos, such as 'A Few Don'ts By an Imagiste' and 'Imagisme' (1913).

A new modernist literary forum also appeared in New York City, with Alfred Kreymborg and Man Ray's little magazine *The Glebe*. Its fifth issue (February 1914) was guest edited by Pound and suggestively titled *Des Imagistes: An Anthology*. While the title signalled modern French literature's importance to imagism, the contents demonstrated a new poetic mode that was distinctly American. Contributors included Aldington, Skipwith Cannell, John Cournos, H.D., F.S. Flint, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Amy Lowell, Pound, Allen Upward, and William Carlos Williams. Lowell, disdainful of Pound's autocratic approach to editing, edited three more imagist anthologies of verse (against Pound's biddings) by the same group, adding American John Fletcher Gould and Briton D.H. Lawrence. In Canada, Florence Livesay, W.W.E. Ross, Raymond Knister, Louise Moray Bowman, and Florence Ayscouth (who collaborated with Lowell on her 1922 book *Fir-Flower Tablets*) published their experiments in modernist little magazines such as *Poetry*, *The Dial*, *The Midland*, *Voices*, *transition*, and *This Quarter*.

Everything changed with the onset of the First World War in which Canada and the United States, while allies in the conflict, had very different experiences. Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, automatically enlisting all members of the British Empire, including Canada. Canada sent 500,000 of its 7.6 million inhabitants to Europe, suffered heavy casualties, but emerged with an affirmed sense of national pride. Many Canadians believe that the nation was forged in the battles of Ypres, Vimy Ridge, and Passchendaele. John McCrae's 1915 poem 'In Flanders Fields', the most famous poem of the war, highlights this pride. Other poets such as Frank Prewett and W.W.E. Ross adapted emerging modernist techniques of harsh juxtapositions, sparse language, violent landscapes, and alienated personas to record the trauma of the frontline.

In 1917, the United States declared war against Germany and, over the next 18 months, sent nearly 4 million of its 100 million people to war. They too suffered heavy casualties, contributed to major victories, and received a nationalist uplift from

the victory. Literary response to the war was mixed. American Edith Wharton, who had moved to Paris in 1911, edited the 1916 *The Book of the Homeless*, an anthology of 41 international authors (including Conrad, Yeats, Stravinsky, and Gide), introduced by former US President Theodore Roosevelt, to raise funds for the war's victims. Like McCrae's poem, this effort was couched in parochial nationalism – it aimed to mobilize Americans to join the fight, then in its third year – but it also highlights a modernist drive to harness the forces remaking the world. Similarly, Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, winner of the 1922 Pulitzer Prize, depicts a drifting protagonist who discovers his purpose by enlisting.

Contrastingly, that same year John Dos Passos published *Three Soldiers*, a gritty novel that bluntly challenged such sentiments. Earlier, at the Harlem Renaissance's dawn, Langston Hughes published 'The Colored Soldier' (1919), juxtaposing the war's rhetoric of black soldiers fighting 'for Democracy' with the racist experience of blacks in America: 'broken was the soldier's dream, too bad to be mended' (Hughes 2001 [1919]: 213). The physical and psychic wounds of the war thus tempered the modernist mood of optimism. Many felt a loss of innocence, lost faith and the notion of civilization's progress due to the war's ugliness – including over 100,000 deaths by chemical weapons. Writers (mostly) stopped glorifying violence as they had done previously, and avant-garde utopian projections abated while polarized political positions hardened.

Following the conflict, much American modernist writing turned introspective and impressionistic, probing the meaning of life in the modern world (e.g. in Fitzgerald and Hemingway) or the meaning of language itself (e.g. in Gertrude Stein, E. E. Cummings, and Wallace Stevens). Sherwood Anderson's elegiac stories lamented the loss of pre-modern small-town innocence. Canadian J. G. Sime's stories, however, highlighted new possibilities for women in the 1920s. In contrast, American William Faulkner's 1929 masterpiece *The Sound and the Fury* depicts a loss of faith in religion and civilization through disintegrated narrative linearity. In this context of deep unrest and guarded optimism, Eliot's 'The Waste Land' appeared in Marianne Moore's New York-based magazine *The Dial*. The often bleak collage of voices presented 'fragments I have shored against my ruins' (Eliot 2006 [1922]: 70).

Alongside such complex stylistic experiments appeared a pared-down and raw genre called noir fiction, fusing imagist pursuit of precision with hardboiled crime's populism. Noir authors such as W.R. Burnett, James Cain, and James Ellroy caught the modernist atmosphere by focusing on victims and criminals, rather than agents of moral order. Hemingway's and Callaghan's noir works resisted reducing crime into a tidy morality play, and stripped language down to a brute force. They moved away from impressionism or cubism toward a more direct vernacular: 'I'd be damned if the glory of literature was in the metaphor [...] Tell the truth cleanly. Weren't the consequences of fraudulent pretending plain to anyone who would look around?' (Callaghan 2006 [1963]: 11). The genre's moody violence explored the question of goodness in a world without God. Callaghan's bestselling books *Such is My Beloved* (1934), *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935), and *More Joy in Heaven* (1937) directed that stylistic precision and moral uncertainty onto the problem of hypocrisy within the Catholic Church. If the Church was an earthly rather than divine institution, what compromises had clergy to make to survive in tough Canadian and American cities?

Tough urban experience also informs the Harlem Renaissance, a 1920s and 1930s movement encompassing many primarily black writers. Pursuing a vernacular style like the noirists and imagists, these writers' works are also informed by the explosion of cultural activity in Harlem. It was driven by deep discontent with Jim Crow politics and a concomitant investment in an independent black culture. Surging interest in black cultural forms produced hybrid genres such as jazz poetry (e.g. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay), or folkloric novels (e.g. Zola Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* [1937]). Such works are by turns celebrational, critical, and revolutionary in their response to the racial politics of the time.

The Great Depression from 1929 exacerbated the period's concerns and helped concentrate many writers' politics. Some highlighted the immorality they detected within modern capitalism. John Steinbeck's novels are exemplary of this development. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *East of Eden* (1952) connect the sparse American style with Communism's socialist realism to highlight the hardship of working-class life in the 1930s. Canadian Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* (1939) depicted police brutality and workers standing up against injustice.

Other writers challenged the rise of fascism, especially with Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Salazar in Portugal, and Franco in Spain. Writers from around the world joined the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936–9). It centred the modernist moral landscape, even as Canada, the United States, Britain, and France remained officially neutral. Hemingway's popular *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) depicts an anti-fascist protagonist's conversion to the cause of the fight. Hemingway had served in Spain as a war correspondent for an American wire service. While most Canadian modernists responded to the war, L.A. MacKay and Charles Yale Harrison made especially important contributions in poetry and in prose, respectively.

Briton W.H. Auden's 1937 long poem 'Spain' is one of the great works of the Spanish Civil War. Auden prominently broke the flow of literary talent to Europe by moving to America in 1939. Though the move was criticized, it presaged the flight of artists from Europe to Canada and America during the Second World War. New York City, in particular, was awash with avant-garde and modernist authors and quickly supplanted Paris as international modernism's capital. Poignantly, New York's Empire State Building had already surpassed the Eiffel Tower to become the largest building in the world in 1931.

In the postwar years, increasingly called 'late modernism', optimism fuelled by victory combined with suspicion of the culture that had produced fascism. Writers and artists sought alternatives, whether in prewar avant-gardes such as surrealism and dadaism, or in new liberated states of consciousness. In late-1940s Québec, French-Canadian poet and playwright Claude Gauvreau, associated with the avant-garde and interdisciplinary group known as the automatists, introduced surrealist irrationalism and spontaneity into his writing. Québécoise authors, such as Gabrielle Roy (originally from Manitoba) and Anne Hébert capitalized on the modernist push to intensely interrogate the province's cloistered, Catholic values.

Others developed early modernist initiatives to focus on their locales' complexity, using setting to probe the unique circumstance of late modernism. William Carlos Williams' long poem *Paterson* begins with precise location – 'Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls' (1946–58 [1946]: 6) – before developing an extended

imagist meditation on place. Charles Olson and writers of the Black Mountain College developed complex models of ‘proprioceptive’ poetry to deepen the connection between poets and their physical contexts. Donald Allen’s influential anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* (1960) collected key writing from this phase of American poetry.

Late modernist American writing often combines early modernist techniques with cynicism, because 50 years of such experiments had failed to resolve any of the issues provoked by modernity. The New York School of Poets and the Beats in the 1950s and 1960s combined early modernist experiments with stream-of-consciousness and jazz poetry into vernacular mannerism. They wanted to explore the possibility of individual liberation in a cloistered, violent society. Jack Kerouac’s 1957 novel *On the Road* epitomizes the possibilities of freedom in America, without ignoring the moral crisis of alienated individuals seeking salvation through technology. Frank O’Hara’s poetry captures the urgency of direct, in-person communication, despite Cold War paranoia.

A Canadian group associated with McLuhan developed Wyndham Lewis’ ideas about the media’s impact on society in conjunction with McLuhan’s theories of the electric age. Reflecting these Canadian vorticist interests, Sheila Watson’s 1959 novel *The Double Hook* imagines a media-less society that, consequently, descends into violence. Modernism had been unable to solve the paradox that increased civilization came with increased violence. Watson’s characters are left to try to resuscitate the wasted landscape with fragments of past cultures. Others imagined post-modernist relationships between humans and nature, such as Marian Engel’s award-winning novel *Bear* (1976), where the protagonist rejects technology and has a romantic affair with a black bear.

Critics continue to debate whether the crises explored by Canadian and American modernist literature have been resolved or set aside. Since the early 1970s it has become common to speak of postmodernism, though the problem of the individual alienated by technology has not clearly been fixed. In a world marked by environmental crises, economic imbalances, and conflict between individual and state or corporate rights, technology seems as much culprit as saviour. While modernism’s urgent longing for a lost stability seems less pressing, especially considering the pervasive impact of human technologies, the modernist paradox remains as desperate as ever.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

MODERNISM AND MUSIC IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES



David Cecchetto and Jeremy Strachan

Musical modernism in Canada and the United States is most notable for the ways it restages musical practice as a means of engaging the question: of what does music actually consist? To pursue this question, we discuss the Canadian and American postserialisms of which the indeterminacy pioneered by John Cage is emblematic, but which also include graphic scoring, minimalism, happenings, and other practices that substitute an emphasis on process for European serialism's engagement with the biases built into conventional notation. From there, we discuss jazz and improvisation, where we suggest that 'music' is taken to reside primarily in its practice such that compositional creativity is inseparable from the ability to perform. Finally, we consider technical innovations in the study of sound as a physical phenomenon, showing how electronic innovations are enabled by acoustic experiments with alternate tunings and just intonations that predate them. Taken together, these three lines of thought by no means exhaust what musical modernism is in Canada and the United States, but they point towards contributions to modernism in general that are emphasized by practitioners in both countries.

CAGE AND CANADIAN/AMERICAN POSTSERIALISMS

The jumping-off point for our argument is Canadian and American musical modernism's relation to the 12-tone serial composition practices that were central to European modernism. While the experimental impulse of serial practice developed by Arnold Schoenberg influenced Canadian and American practitioners of both jazz and art music, the prescriptiveness of this approach was less resonant. For example, John Cage's lessons with Schoenberg helped him develop the disciplined approach that characterizes much of his work, but did not directly influence its substance. Similarly, while jazz musicians in the 1940s at times borrowed serialism's atonality, the resulting music bore little resemblance to this element of its provenance. This was partly due to other forces that shaped jazz's early development, particularly Afro-diasporic musical cultures and the racial politics of the early twentieth century. In short, serial methods were rarely germinal in Canadian and American musical modernisms, even when serial effects were audible.

Postserialism is thus ironically more significant to Canadian and American musical modernism than serialism itself, where postserialism denotes a set of practices that sometimes even predate serialism's sedimentations in Canadian and American music. The pre-history of Canadian and American musical modernism includes both European figures who loom large in the global history of modernism – Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Strauss, and so on – and composers such as Conlon Nancarrow and Ruth Crawford Seeger. Nancarrow lived in relative isolation and produced works for player piano that were impossible for humans to perform. Seeger was influenced by American folk music as much as by the serial methodology she regularly employed. Canadian and American musical modernism contributes to the development of musical techniques, but also – and more importantly – intervenes in what music is: Canadian and US modernism charts an unprecedented expansion of 'music', moving it off the page of conventional notation and into the always-changing world of cultural practices.

Perhaps the central figure of Canadian and American musical modernism is John Cage, who exemplifies his milieu's spirit of excitement and interdisciplinarity. Cage is notable for his pioneering use of non-standard instruments, and early in his career composed a number of works for percussion: *Quartet* (1935, for four percussionists), *Trio* (1936, for three), and the *Constructions* series. In this, Cage was influenced by the French composer Edgard Varèse, whose *Ionisation* (1929–31) was the first Western composition to use exclusively percussion instruments. Cage was also attracted to Varèse's term for his work: 'organized sound'; Varèse's eschewal of harmony in favour of timbre and rhythm necessitates a new conception of what music is, what it means, and how it matters.

This new conception demanded new technical innovations. In addition to being amongst the first to use radios and electronics as live instruments, Cage also developed a new acoustic instrument in 1940: the prepared piano, a conventional piano with objects (such as bolts, screws, pieces of rubber) inserted on its hammers and between its strings to obfuscate pitch in favour of timbre. In addition to its aesthetic properties, this instrument takes practical advantage of the ready availability (and relative smallness) of pianos and the fact a single pianist can play a number of distinct timbres (using different preparations). Both combined to make the instrument popular in Cage's collaborations and co-productions with dancers, including Merce Cunningham, his artistic and personal partner.

Another way of understanding the shift that comes with Cage's use of percussion is to note that pitch is not absent per se in percussion instruments, but is dispersed and indeterminate. For Cage, indeterminacy became so important that he supplemented his conceptual and technical expansion of music with an indeterminate methodological one: he began applying chance operations in various parameters of his works, including their structure, pitch, rhythm, density, and duration. These operations were executed in myriad ways: the use of dice, imperfections in paper, and the *I Ching* system of divination. Cage thus ushered in an approach to music that closed the gap between music and everyday sounds by treating all sound as meaningful. The most notorious example of this approach is 4'33" (1952), his famous 'silent' piece in which performers are instructed to play nothing throughout the work's three movements.

In a different type of indeterminacy Cage also experimented with graphical approaches to notation, which lead to works that varied dramatically from

performance to performance. This approach – which did not originate with Cage – played an important role in Canadian and American musical modernism.¹ Composer R. Murray Schafer has made use of non-standard notation, and many of Schafer's scores – including his 12-part *Patria* cycle (1966-present) – treat the score's appearance as part of the aesthetic project. Finally, many composers abandoned conventional notation altogether, preferring graphic renderings and 'event scores' consisting entirely of text.

A significant collection of such instruction scores is Yoko Ono's 1964 *Grapefruit*:

TUNAFISH SANDWICH PIECE

Imagine one thousand suns in the
sky at the same time.

Let them shine for one hour.

Then, let them gradually melt
into the sky.

Make one tunafish sandwich and eat.

(1964 [Spring])

This break with musical convention is partially due to Ono's close association with the visual and performance art scenes where music was understood in relation to other conceptual practices. The lines between these disciplines were increasingly porous; the expansion of music Cage advocated did not simply cover all sounds, but all practices. Indeed, Cage's definition of theatre – 'something which engages the eye and the ear' – applies equally to musical performance (qtd. in Kirby and Schechner 1965: 50).

This shift took place in an interdisciplinary scene that often included sociality as an aesthetic practice. Cage and Ono were both part of Fluxus, a loosely knit intermedia group comprised of dozens of artists from multiple disciplines. Both also participated in 'happenings', seemingly chaotic multidisciplinary events.² The emerging American scene partially obsolesced disciplinary boundaries: artists as different as Meredith Monk, Morton Feldman, John Ashbery, William Burroughs, Elaine Summers, and dozens of others circulated in close proximity.

This emerging scene helped dissolve conventional boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art. What came to be known as musical minimalism highlighted this shift through its association with the New York downtown music scene, which included non-traditional musical fora: Steve Reich and Philip Glass were amongst the first composers to present their work outside the concert hall, in locations from public squares to art galleries. Reich was notable for his 1965 *It's Gonna Rain*, consisting of two mono recordings of the same track looped at slightly different tempi to produce a composite effect that is difficult to disentangle. This technique of 'phasing' became Reich's main compositional method during the 1960s in *Piano Phase* and *Violin Phase* (1967) and *Drumming* (1970).

Musical minimalism – 'by definition, any music that works with limited or minimal materials' – is characterized by repetition of brief motives, a steady beat, and a perceptible process (Johnson 1991).³ The resulting sound anticipates later developments in popular electronic music, an influence readily heard in Terry Riley's *In C* (1964), one of minimalism's major early works. *In C* consists of 53 short musical cells played

by any number of instrumentalists, each repeating them as many times as she wishes (and pausing between segments as long as she wishes). This form of indeterminacy – where the composer presents a constrained set of nonetheless determinate choices to the performers – is aleatoric: although performers have different options available, it is possible to play a wrong note since the composer achieves a predetermined result only by using a slowly shifting sonority and steady beat (for Cage, by contrast, the goal was to use indeterminacy to subvert authorial intention).⁴

Cage's life and work connect many disparate activities and characterize the spirit of this time and place: treating music as a *process* more than a *thing*. This approach captures the departure from serialism undertaken by many Canadian and American composers.

JAZZ AND IMPROVISATION

The processual nature of music is nowhere more evident than in jazz and improvisation, yet the tension between Cagean postserial practices and their antecedents also bears on jazz's development as a modernist form in Canada and the United States. The implications of serialism for tonal harmony and its expanded use of dissonance afforded a modernist foothold. By the 1950s, jazz's imbrication within a modernist purview had been well established. Since the 1940s, bebop had 'routinely' been called modernist (Rasula 2005: 157): melodic and harmonic developments by musicians such as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie foregrounded technique and virtuosity. Bebop's emergence as the heir to swing in the late 1940s was reflected in swing's battle with Dixieland revivalism, which in turn reenacted the conflict between traditionalism and modernism 'so endemic to Western culture' (Gendron 2002: 123).

Bebop's importance to modernism lies in how it marked jazz musicians' adoption of a highbrow European aesthetic stance, and made it a 'fundamental element of their music' (Laver 2009: 2). The 'emancipation of dissonance' that 12-tone composition promised was reflected in the increasing atonality of bebop: musicians tended towards abstracting harmonic frameworks in solos, and the language of improvisation became further removed from the melodic content of any given 'head'.⁵ The smaller size of bebop combos allowed improvisation to flourish, and shifted the focus back onto soloists and group interplay.

While tracing a causative narration of shifts in improvisational style is problematic, improvisation's trajectory in the twentieth century has been typically modernist in its assault on convention. While free jazz in the mid-1960s was connected to that decade's turbulence, its role as a modernist expression manifests in how sound became a legitimate component of improvisation outside of harmonic or structural considerations.⁶ In a similar vein to Cage's reclamation of the piano's percussive qualities, pianist Cecil Taylor's aggressively rhythmic approach to improvisation appears with his 1956 debut *Jazz Advance*: the atonal and cluster-filled solos forecast the style of improvising Taylor would cultivate in later decades, foregrounding the piano's physical and material sonorities over its ability to play harmonically and melodically.

That sound itself can be a locus of meaning separate from its rhetorical associations manifest in improvisatory practices explored in the 1960s by Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Albert Ayler, and Sun Ra. Coltrane's technique of rapid harmonic and scalar

runs, dubbed ‘sheets of sound’ by Ira Gitler,⁷ achieve the opposite of their intended effect, obscuring harmony and meter in a lattice of sound that highlights the saxophonist’s mastery of technique and improvisation. In Coltrane’s recordings from 1966–7, the saxophone’s timbral resources become as much a component of improvisation as any other musical element, exemplified in the album of duets with drummer Rashied Ali, *Interstellar Space* (1967). Coltrane acolytes Sanders and Ayler both extensively used the altissimo register, overblowing, and multiphonics, elaborating the sonic vocabulary available to jazz improvisers. Finally, the afrofuturism of Sun Ra relied on complex myth-narratives about black cultural rejuvenation as much as on misappropriating musical technologies to create the vision of a ‘prosthetically enhanced future’ (Dery 1994: 180): Sun Ra’s pioneering use of electronic keyboards and synthesizers (dating back to the 1950s) prioritized an experimental approach to sound and timbre, radically expanding notions of performance.⁸

INTONATIONS, TECHNOLOGIES, AND SOUNDSCAPES

In different ways, both jazz and postserialism move music’s materiality away from notated scores towards embodied practices. The Cagean ethos of listening and the jazz ethos of doing parallel technical innovations in the study of sound as a physical phenomenon. This shift occurs along a number of lines, which at times intersect and at others diverge. We discuss this shift in three veins: loudspeaker practices flowing from the advent of the phonograph in the late nineteenth century; work involving equal temperament and just intonation issuing at once from scientific findings and attention to older non-Western musical practices; and approaches to sound that acknowledge its social life by treating it ecologically.

The loudspeaker’s invention remains a critical development: virtually every predictably repeatable or transportable sound, from recordings to synthesis, operates through it. Such a change naturally had tremendous consequences for musical modernism at all levels, affecting audiences, composers, and performers. Pianist Glenn Gould ultimately eschewed the vagaries of concert performance in favour of recordings produced by splicing multiple takes together to achieve an ideal interpretation. Gould also recognized the conceptual shift linked to listening practices that took place with the growing ubiquity of radio broadcasts: Gould’s *The Idea of North* (1967) was conceived as a ‘contrapuntal radio documentary’ and uses montage and voice counterpoint ‘to express the antagonism and scope of [Canada]’ (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2013 [1967]). Clearly influenced by his predecessors in film as well as by the cut-up technique popularized by William S. Burroughs in the late 1950s, Gould also developed a specifically musical sensibility in the formal and acoustic properties of *Idea*. Moreover, Gould understood that the complexity he found so appealing in Bach’s contrapuntal style (of which he was a renowned interpreter) and Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic music could be extended in the context of repeated listening afforded by home playback devices: the notions of re-listening, pausing, and rewinding we now take for granted were unheard of prior to this technological development.

Recording technologies changed the production and consumption of analogue music, then, by making all music potentially reproducible and re-playable in a new

setting. The potential of loudspeakers was also being explored in creating new sounds altogether, particularly through the use of oscillators controlled by changes in voltage. Artists and scientists understood that both pitch and rhythm could be expressed in terms of frequency, so that any sound could be broken down into a set of constituent actions repeated at specific frequencies. Hugh Le Caine was a key contributor to developments in this area. Most notably, around 1948 he invented the *Electronic Sackbut*, a polyphonic touch-sensitive organ ‘with which one could control pitch, volume and tone quality in live performance [using voltage control]’ (Young). Le Caine also created the *musique concrète*⁹ piece *Dripsody* (1955), which alters the sound of a single drop of water in myriad ways. Finally, Le Caine designed the *Sonde* (1968),¹⁰ an instrument that generates 200 sine tones (i.e. simple, single-pitch tones) simultaneously.

Part of the realization that a single sound can be broken down into constituent parts is the fact that every sound contains overtones (or partials), frequencies that are multiples of the fundamental pitch.¹¹ While Le Caine explored the possibilities of partials with electric technologies, other musicians attended to them in acoustic settings via alternate systems of tuning, some of them millennia old. If we accept ¹²-tone equal temperament as a modern invention par excellence, alternatives to it are crucial to modernism’s critical ethos.

For some composers, such as Easley Blackwood and Erv Wilson, this experimentation took the form of alternate forms of equal temperament, where the octave is divided into greater or fewer than twelve equal parts. More prominently, composers explored the use of ‘just intonation’, a system of tuning that remains true to the pitch ratios characteristic of conventional tonality (but which the latter slightly skews for pragmatic reasons).¹² The advantages of the just intonation system were the resulting ‘acoustically pure’ sounds and new compositional methods it implies. Thus, just as minimalist composers sometimes structured their works in terms of a predetermined process, Tenney’s *Critical Band* (1988) systematically explores the eponymous acoustic phenomenon rather than working within a rhetoric of music per se.

Increased attention to the social life of sound – to how aurality emphasizes different elements of the world than visuality and tactility – paralleled these technical changes. Acoustic ecology (sometimes called ‘soundscape studies’) focuses on how sound mediates relationships among beings and environments and began in the 1960s with the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. Acoustic ecology did not emerge in a vacuum but rather merges with other social movements of the time, particularly environmental activism. Similarly, strictly musical precedents can be found: Charles Ives’ use of spatiality in *The Unanswered Question* (1906), for example, suggests a sensitivity to the way that sound moves as a force through a relational field rather than existing simply as a discrete measurable entity. An important development from this movement is ‘soundwalking’, ‘any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment’ (Westerkamp 2001).

CONCLUSION

Each of the three vectors of Canadian and American musical modernism we have indicated mobilizes a new understanding of musical and sonic materiality: what music is, does, and means. In addition to these major trends, there are numerous

histories that have only registered in a limited manner beyond the context of Canada and the United States. Foremost amongst these trends are various First Nations and Indigenous musical practices that have for years flourished both as rigorous critiques of colonial practices and as discrete cultural productions in their own right, but which have only recently been taken up in scholarly work with a degree of specificity equal to the nuance of their creation. Like the practices we've discussed, such music expands the materialities of music in unique and specific ways, for example by questioning the predicates of authorship and ownership and by troubling distinctions between tradition and contemporaneity. These practices thus contribute to the 'variegated response to a manifold modernity' that characterizes modernism more generally (Ross 2009: 1). Thus, even as we increasingly acknowledge the plurality of the musical world, the critical project that musical modernism unfolds becomes increasingly relevant.

NOTES

1. The question of the origin of graphical notation is not easily answerable because it is one of degrees: 'standard notation' is in essence a system of graphical elements, and varying degrees of graphical notation appear throughout the world and the histories of notation. Cage's innovation was equally to interrogate this aspect of notation and to employ it.
2. Numerous 1960s performance genres incorporated dance, theatre, music, poetry, and other artistic forms: events, environmental theatre, happenings, etc., each having its own distinguishing features and conditions. See Sallenford (2005), and, for a contemporary view on 1960s performance art, Kostelanetz (1968: 3–45).
3. As Nyman (1999: 139–41) observes, minimalism's origins can also be tied to serialism, like many of the forms discussed here.
4. Riley was not dispensing with the importance of listening and musicality for the sake of indeterminacy. *In C*'s performing directions specifically outline the conditions for a good performance: 'It is very important that performers listen very carefully to one another and this means occasionally to drop out and listen. [...] One of the joys of *In C* is the interaction of the players in polyrhythmic combinations that spontaneously arise between patterns.' Reprinted in the liner notes of Terry Riley (2009) [1964] *In C* (Sony Classical MS 7178, compact disc).
5. Thelonious Monk, perhaps the most enduring personification of bop's experimental ambitions with nakedly dissonant musical language, was a radical improviser who claimed always to be playing melodically within the ambit of the composition.
6. Free jazz has been frequently connected to larger issues that transformed the cultural landscape of 1960s America, such as the civil rights movement, Black nationalism, and other countercultural expressions of dissidence. Mark Gridley (2007) and Ingrid Monson (2007) have shown that this relationship is complex and problematic. Monson writes the harsh shrieks of John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Pharoah Sanders, *et al.* were taken as anger rather than 'spiritual exploration'; further, borrowing a phrase from Paul Gilroy, Monson suggests that free jazz's expanded sonic language must be considered as part of an African-American 'counterculture of modernity' (2007: 304, 306).
7. This term has become commonplace to describe Coltrane's style of dense runs during the mid to late 1950s. Gitler used it first in the liner notes to the 1958 album *Soultrane*.
8. See Szwed (1997) and Locke (1999).
9. *Musique concrète* is a style of electroacoustic music that combines recordings with synthesis and/or manipulation. Developed in the 1940s by Pierre Schaeffer, it is often contrasted with *elektronische Musik*, which uses only synthesized sounds.

10. Both these instruments were initially designed in Le Caine's home studio, as Le Caine was employed as a physicist at the National Research Council (NRC) in Ottawa, developing micro-wave radio transmission and contributing to exploration in nuclear physics (Young).
11. For example, partials allow us to differentiate the sound of a piano and a guitar playing the same pitch.
12. Notably, the conventional 12-part division of the octave – and particularly the notions of consonance and dissonance that inhere in its use – is based on using these ratios to collapse naturally occurring partials into an octave. A major third (M₃), for example, can be expressed as the ratio 5/4. The first naturally occurring M₃ is the fifth partial (i.e. five times the frequency of the fundamental pitch) and is heard 28 semitones above the fundamental; this pitch can be transposed down two octaves (to 28-12-12 = 4 semitones). Thus, for example, a 'true' M₃ above A₄₄₀ Hz would be 550Hz (440* 5/4). In standard equal temperament this is slightly skewed to a C# at 554Hz because the exponential increase in frequency that underwrites the ratio system is measured logarithmically so as to produce uniformity.

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CHAPTER SIXTY

THEATRICAL MODERNISM

Canada and the United States



Alan Filewod

The emergence of modernist theatre in Canada and the United States was an encounter of metropolitan theory and practice, derived chiefly from Europe, with local discoveries and innovations. From the early years of the twentieth century to the end of the 1930s, this encounter shifted its focus as the new proposition of theatre as a fine art – ‘theatre art’ – met regional and ideological challenges.

Conventionally, histories of theatrical modernism in Canada and the United States trace the emergence of modernism in terms of the explorations of playwrights and theatrical auteurs as changing material technologies of theatre practice enabled new dramaturgies and narratives. From this narrow inquiry developed an understanding of modernism as a disciplinary procedure that can be traced through historical archives of texts, images, designs, and mise-en-scène, with recurring emphases on the techniques of montage, expressionist dialogue, scrim projections, polyphony, documentary, and compositional mise-en-scène. In this understanding, modernism is a particular artistic stance, defined by specific attitudes and techniques.

In 1956, John Gassner, the critic and anthologist whose books, such as *Producing the Play* and *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre*, were instrumental in the canonization of modernist theatre and drama, offered his conclusion that ‘the modern theatre appears as an enterprise strongly marked by instability, eclecticism, and a mélange of genres’ (1956: viii). As Gassner had come to realize, there can be no singular definition of modernism; rather, it must be understood as asymmetric, emerging in different forms according to place and context. It can be understood as an ongoing debate in which the terms constantly shifted as theatre practice changed and stage technology opened new paths of artistic discovery. In Canada and the United States, that debate was expressed as much in print as in artistic practice, and can be understood in terms of three main issues: the transmission of the European avant-garde, the ‘rough’ modernism of cultural forms transformed by rapid technological change, and the revolutionary modernism that repositioned the debate in terms of class and politics.

EUROPEAN TRANSMISSIONS

By the end of the nineteenth century, new developments in European stagecraft and playwriting – the emergence of what came to be known as ‘modern drama’ – had made their way across the Atlantic. These included the dramatic experiments of Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, and the new realism in stagecraft, made possible in large part by the invention of electrical stage lighting a generation earlier. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the dominant production model in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada, was that of the theatre business, in which a handful of monopoly syndicates controlled the transatlantic flow of theatrical tours. The major enterprise, known as the Theatrical Syndicate, was an alliance of booking agents who controlled large regional theatre circuits that had developed when rail transportation enabled ‘combination companies’ to take to the road. For 15 years, until the monopoly was broken in the ‘theatre wars’ by the upstart rival Shubert chain, the Theatrical Syndicate effectively controlled all theatrical booking in Canada and the United States through contract and coercion. As with modern film distribution, the syndicates centralized production (of sensational dramas, comedies, and melodramas in the main) in New York, and sent their shows out on ‘the road’.

The major concern about such centralized power sprang from the effect it inevitably had on theatrical creativity, and through that, on national culture. The syndicates consolidated a system in which the box office was the only marker of value. Detractors feared that the syndicate system degraded the larger stream of culture by forcing artists and producers to create works that would feed the system and, as a result, legitimize an aesthetic structure of value based on mass taste; in Canada this was also seen as an ‘annexation’ of Canadian stages that impeded the development of a national dramatic literature (Sandwell 1911: 11).

As Syndicate control of the theatre weakened, theatrical exchanges became more possible, and the idea that theatre was an art and not simply an entertainment business gradually took hold in metropolitan centres. This was abetted by developments in dramatic theory and the impact of European modern drama. A major figure in this impact was George Pierce Baker, professor of drama at Harvard from 1888 to 1924, and then at Yale until 1933. Baker was an advocate of the new realism, and in 1909 was a founder of the American Drama League and its influential journal, *The Drama*. Although not a modernist, he was a major force in changing the public perception of drama and the gradual acceptance of drama as literature.

The issue on which ‘modern’ and ‘modernism’ diverged was the nature of textuality in the theatre. For the modernists, theatre was a synthesizing art in which dramatic text was only one thread in a larger polysemic performance text. The publication of Edward Gordon Craig’s *On the Art of the Theatre* (1911) was a milestone event that championed the role of what we now call the director, the ‘theatre-artist’ who brings all the elements of script, design, and production into a visionary artwork. Craig was the most influential of a generation that proposed a mystical high modernism that would restore spirituality and community in the theatre as a corrective to debased commercialism and alienating industrialism.

Roy Mitchell, the first director of the University of Toronto’s Hart House Theatre (founded in 1919), followed with his book *Creative Theatre* in 1929. Like Craig,

Mitchell believed that the theatre depended on creative authority in the person of the magisterial auteur, which he likened to a samurai who ‘lives by his devotion and the loyalties he can command in return. He must award all praise and shoulder all blame’ (253). The iconic image of the visionary director as artist-priest who leads by genius and mastery is a recurring trope in high modernism in which we can discern the pervasive gendering of theatre leadership as a primarily male domain.

Ideas and plays travelled west, but increasingly Canadians and Americans travelled east to see for themselves what was happening on European stages. Their encounters with European modernists and their experience of seeing companies such as the Moscow Art Theatre opened the door to new approaches to acting and design. In 1914 Sheldon Cheney, the critic and author whose *The New Movement in the Theatre* (1914) was one of the first American homages to Gordon Craig, declared that ‘real drama is independent of the artificial “scenery” and crowded naturalistic “properties” that clutter up the commercial stage’ (ii). Two years later he founded *Theatre Arts Magazine* to promote the ‘experimental theatre’ devoted to the new stagecraft and the development of acting as an art rather than a trade. *Theatre Arts* became the primary conduit of reportage on the new movement.

This was the beginning of the Little Theatre Movement, modelled on the European initiatives such as Strindberg’s Intimate Theatre and Antoine’s Theatre Libré. In the United States the first such theatre was established in Chicago’s Hull House in 1910. Two years later, Maurice Brown launched his Chicago Little Theatre, and over the next decade dozens of similar troupes, invariably amateur, opened across the continent. It was in these theatres that audiences saw the new wave of European drama; over time they became crucibles of new dramaturgy and playwriting.

Other major figures who reported on new European developments and advocated modernist reform included Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Edmond Jones (*Continental Stagecraft*, 1922), and Hallie Flanagan (*Shifting Scenes in European Theatre*, 1928). They were positioned to influence the reforms they sought: Jones had spent a year in Berlin, and with McGowan was affiliated with the Provincetown Playhouse; Flanagan, a Vassar professor, went on to be the director of the Federal Theatre Project, the vast New Deal relief project that transformed the American theatrical word between 1935–9 by promoting regional and cultural diversity and popularizing modernist practices.

‘ROUGH’ MODERNISM

The circulation of European theory and practice justifies Raymond Williams’ note that modernism refers to ‘particular tendencies’ in ‘experimental art and writing’ between 1890 and 1940 (1976: 208). This genealogy is useful in explaining the institutionalization of modernist practice in metropolitan theatre cultures. But most theatre cultures were not metropolitan; they were provincial, local, and asynchronic in the interstices of metropolitan and imperial cultural dominance. Their encounter with modernism was ‘rough’, as James Harding uses the term when he writes of the modernist avant-garde that

[t]he contrast here is between a definition of the avant-garde that, on the one hand, is centered around an imagined European cultural homogeneity that

expanded in influence, or a definition, on the other hand, whose territorial coordinates were always heterogeneous, dispersed, and diversely located in moments of contestation.

(2006: 27)

Harding's 'imagined European cultural homogeneity' can be mapped across the centres of European and American colonial power at the end of the nineteenth century. On that map 'interstitial' identifies cultural production in the fissures of metropolitan discourse. In the interstices, modernism cannot be reduced to particular methods of performance and staging but can be traced in changing practices in the labour of initiating and advocating theatrical innovation in the shadow of imperial power. Theatre artists outside of metropolitan centres often encountered European modernism by reading about it, or seeing the occasional touring production.

For popular audiences, who did not see the salons of Paris or the theatres of imperial capitals, modernist performance came into their lives through mass media, and through futurist visions delivered in popular magazines. The development of the European avant-garde parallels the rapid developments in mass media at the end of the nineteenth century, and can be plotted against the domestication of wireless communications and radio. If the high modernist ideal was an affective performance in a small intimate theatre, the lived 'rough' modernism was a family sitting around a radio, listening to *The Shadow* or Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds*. At the heart of modernity was the ability of mass communication to disseminate, mobilize, and silence social phenomena.

It is in the intersection of theatre and communication technology that the most significant innovation in American modernism emerged, with the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper Unit. As part of Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA), designed to create jobs for the unemployed, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was given the task of creating work for theatre artists. Under the aegis of the FTP, an immense burst of creative energy saw dozens of troupes form across the United States (there was no comparable project in Canada). It was in effect a decentred, community-based national theatre that staged approximately 1,000 productions. In its three-year report, the FTP reported that it had close to 13,000 people on the payroll in 1936, and by 1937 had played to an estimated 30,000,000 people; its radio division produced some 9,000 programmes. The massive scale of the FTP was in itself a monumental achievement of a unique and diverse American modernism. Unlike nationally organized theatre systems in other industrial countries, particularly Germany and the USSR (in both of which the theatre was an arm of state propaganda), the FTP was a hybrid of public money and private initiative, with local creative control at the community level.

Of the FTP's many innovations, the Living Newspaper Unit had the greatest public impact, and its documentary plays on social issues generated controversy that resulted in a congressional shut-down of the FTP in 1939. The idea of a living newspaper was not in itself new: in the USSR, living newspaper troupes such as the Blue Blouses were an effective vehicle of propaganda for often illiterate audiences during the civil war. The FTP's Living Newspaper Unit was unique in that it was a collaboration between theatre artists and unemployed members of the American Newspaper Guild. The meeting of creative artists and professional journalists produced a form of dramatized

investigative journalism, staged with highly theatrical effects, using short scenes with point-of-view characters and the loudspeaker voice of the Living Newspaper as the editorial announcer and commentator.

The first Living Newspaper, *Ethiopia* (on the subject of the Italian invasion to annex Ethiopia), was banned after one performance for the press by the FTP administration because it depicted Mussolini in violation of a directive that ‘no one impersonating a ruler or cabinet officer shall actually appear on the stage’ (Favorini 1995: 24). Unlike the later newspaper shows, *Ethiopia* was what is now called a verbatim documentary, in which every line of dialogue is an exact quotation from actuality. The template style of the Living Newspaper emerged with the two most controversial plays, *Triple-A Plowed Under* (about the Agricultural Adjustment Act) and *Injunction Granted!* (a politically charged critique of judicial repression of workers’ rights). The two major successes of the New York unit were *Power*, on the subject of power generation, and *One-Third of a Nation*, on the subject of tenement slums. The Chicago unit had equal success with *Spirochete*, which advocated mandatory screening for syphilis. The hybridity of the Living Newspaper form – fusing investigation, imagistic theatrical commentary, comedy, and episodic vignettes – survived the demise of the FTP to become a familiar technique for the theatricalization of social issues without the mediation of dramatic invention, and remains one of the enduring discoveries of American modernism.

REVOLUTIONARY MODERNISM

With their focus on political analysis, social realities, and reportable facts, the Living Newspapers were antithetical to the idealist and spiritual principles of the high modernist movement. They marked divergent vectors of modernity, and the point of divergence can be traced to the insurgency of revolutionary modernism. By the end of the 1920s, high modernism was under attack by a younger generation that identified modernity with revolutionary political and cultural change. Against the metaphysical humanism of European modernism, they advocated the cultural specificity of class formation. This was the era of the workers’ theatre movement, during which Communist parties around the world strove to organize the cultural sector and to recruit radical intelligentsia. In this sphere, the changing directions of policy in the Communist International (Comintern) – from Stalin’s ‘Third Period’ call for class war in 1929 to the broad alliances of the Popular Front in the mid-1930s – were played out in debates over artistic form and critical reception in the brief moment when artistic and political radicalisms aligned in a vision of an artistic practice mobilized by proletarian modernity.

The idea of militant workers’ theatre and mobile agitprop developed in Russia and Germany as a form of exhortative revolutionary theatre designed for quick outdoor performance. It was adaptive and could adjust easily to changes in location, audience, and cast, and it suited the sightlines and acoustics of outdoor performance in found space. Short phrases, heavy cadence, and repetition allowed performance to project through noisy and unruly audiences. The very word ‘agitprop’ (from Lenin’s directive that political journalism should combine agitation and propaganda) was a badge of modernism, conveying the terse telegraphic efficiencies of Bolshevik bureaucratic rhetoric.

In Canada and the United States there was a long-established radical theatre tradition, chiefly in the trade union movement, but its alignment with modernist theatre came from the radical Left. The spread of agitprop as a principal tactic of the Workers' Theatre movement began with the adaptation of German practices in Canada, the United States, and Europe. A formative figure was Hans Bohn, a German communist activist who moved to New York to organize in the German community, changed his name to John Bonn, and founded Prolet-Buehne in 1925. Its drilled, choreographic performances, with emphasis on choral recitations and mass chant, established a template for agitprop troupes such as the Shock Troupe of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre and the Toronto-based Workers' Experimental Theatre. Bonn also founded the magazine *Workers Theatre* and established the League of Workers' Theatres, which functioned as the organizational and ideological centres that linked the Canadian and American workers' theatres to the Comintern.

At its peak, encouraged by the Comintern, agitprop was proposed as a new form of proletarian modernism. One of the most important articulations of its theory was Al Saxe's essay, 'Newsboy: from script to performance' in *New Theatre* (as *Workers Theatre* was renamed in 1934), in which he theorized the play's fusion of fragmented dialogue, imagery, rapid movement and repetition as a performance machine driven by dialectic and tempo rather than dramatic causality. Saxe called *Newsboy* 'a new form' and '[o]ne of the most pliable, dynamic theatre of action forms which has yet appeared' (1985: 289).

Newsboy was the most influential English-language agitprop, innovative and adaptive enough to adjust to changing ideological values and political contexts. It is also, along with the Canadian agitprop *Eight Men Speak* in that same year, an early version of the living newspaper. It was a theatrical adaptation of a poem by V.L. Jerome in which a newsboy begins to understand the political truth behind the headlines. A 12-minute swirling montage of images and movements, with screaming headlines, ballet moves, and rapid transitions, it was an early example of what is now called 'physical theatre', in which the bodies of the actors create the text in the moment of performance.

The workers' theatre movement theorized agitprop as the theatricalization of modernity, an artisanal performance machine specific to proletarian industrial culture and characterized as adaptive, mobile, and disciplined. Writing in *New Theatre*, Mordecai Gorelik linked the idea of machine culture to revolutionary modernism:

The machine is a natural, creative extension of human biology and human culture finds its crystallization freely and naturally in the machine. Hence all blind resistance to the machine, whether in the social or the aesthetic field, must cease, and the machine must be confidently handled.

(1933: 12)

In practice, most agitprop functioned as simple propaganda and its practitioners sought ways to make it more theatrically complex and dramatically intelligent. Most of the agitprops performed by the workers' theatre were short, declarative, and iconic theatrical cartoons or choral mass recitations. Of these, the mass recitation was perhaps the most innovative agitprop form, and the one that most clearly modelled the aesthetics of revolutionary modernism. The mass recitation was modernist theatre

stripped to its barest theatricality. It combines the cadence and oratory of nineteenth-century recitations with the staccato rhythms, segues, and transitions of radio. It is telegraphic in its terseness, and semaphoric in its use of signifying bodies. At its most effective it was drilled and choreographic.

As with the physical theatre of *Newsboy* and the iconic cartoon style of mobile agitprop, mass recitations can be seen as American adaptations of established European practices. Against this, Saxe's theory that the rapid play of light, character, and tempo enacted the dialectics of the historical moment – 'the feverish tempo of industrialization gone mad' – argued in effect that radical dramaturgy was a discovery of material principles rather than a received archive of genealogical forms (Saxe 1985: 290). This was a position that acknowledged but refuted the emergent narrative that located the Canadian and American workers' theatre practice in the genealogy of European theatrical modernism.

The Workers' Theatre movement dispelled with the onset of the Popular Front in 1934–5, when troupes were ordered to shed their radical signifiers, make alliances with the theatrical mainstream, and turn their attention to realist drama, artistry, and national canons. In this new regime, agitprop was subjected to ideological revision, and was discounted as crude propaganda, although the repertoire of agitprop techniques would resurface in the Living Newspapers.

CONCLUSION

The historical process by which modernism was absorbed into Canadian and American cultural practice as a repertoire of methods rather than a cause and a stance can be typified by the premiere of Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty* in New York in 1934. Odets was an actor in the modernist Group Theatre, which had been one of the vectors that introduced the rehearsal techniques of Konstantin Stanislavsky to American theatre. Odets had written a one-act play about a recent taxi strike, and performed it at a Group Theatre benefit for *New Theatre* magazine. *Waiting for Lefty* combined agitprop sequences with intensely realist dramatic episodes, and in effect it enacted the cultural politics of the Popular Front by absorbing the militancy of agitprop in the social humanism of dramatic realism. The play begins as a strike meeting of a taxi driver's union local, and the agitprop narrative frame leads to short, realist scenes that flash to the moments that radicalized the workers. The play ends with a mass exhortation that famously brought the audience to its feet to join the call to strike.

In the year following its premiere, Odets excised the most explicitly communist scene and released the play without royalties. Across the English-speaking world in 1935–6, theatres with names like Theatre of Action, New Theatre, Unity Theatre – names that recurred across national boundaries – produced *Waiting for Lefty* to enable and obscure their transition from their agitprop beginnings and reconstitute themselves as professional 'people's theatres'. For many of those theatres, *Waiting for Lefty* was their schooling in modernist theatre practice. A surviving copy of the first magazine publication of the play in the papers of Toby Gordon, a founder of the Toronto Worker's Theatre, reformed as Theatre of Action in 1936, offers an example, marked up with handwritten marginal notes that indicate Stanislavskian unit/objective analysis. Stanislavsky was one of the revered masters of high modernism

and his iconic status in Russia helped radical theatre artists accept the new directions of realism. They were encouraged too by the new discourse that valorized artistic craft. In this Stanislavsky gave them the tools of analysis, and playwrights like Odets began writing plays that made that analysis necessary.

In this process, Stanislavsky's ideas gradually transformed the acting profession in Canada and the United States. He became dematerialized, transformed from man to a set of teachings. By the end of the 1930s, members of the Group Theatre – Stella Adler, Lee Strasbourg, Harold Clurman, and Sanford Meisner – had Americanized Stanislavsky by adapting his techniques to a new introspective training regime that would come to be called 'the Method'. The closing of the Group Theatre in 1941 dispersed the teaching of method acting across Canada and the United States, and marks a point of assimilation of modernism in the professional mainstream.

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CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

MODERNISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES



Diana Nemirow

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW: EARLY MODERNISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Arguably the most important event in the early history of modernism in the United States was the Armory Show, held in New York in 1913. Organized by a mixed group of more or less progressive artists, its aim was to set the best of American art alongside European developments. Featuring over 1,200 works, one-third of them European, the exhibition was pulled together in record time after a whirlwind tour around the art capitals of Europe by the organizing committee members, who relied on expatriate contacts to gain access to influential dealers, artists, and critics. The American selection, equally hasty, was eclectic and included a relatively small number of artists whose outlook could be described as modern.

The Armory Show far surpassed in breadth and ambition any previous display of modern art in the United States. Its intention was to trace the roots of the modern movement from the nineteenth century up to Picasso and the cubists. Although criticized for excluding the futurists and for a poor representation of contemporary German expressionism, it brought to public attention the major post impressionists, fauves, and cubists, with an especially strong showing of Henri Matisse and important sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brancusi. Moreover, because its wealthy backers harnessed the exhibition to a huge publicity machine, the show entered the popular imagination and challenged complacency about the role of art, even while meeting with a powerful backlash. Matisse was reviled in the press for his supposedly crude and childish drawing, but the real *succès de scandale* was Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, whose cubist structure – combined with the artist's complete disregard for the conventions of the nude – provoked parody, perplexity, and outrage. Nevertheless, evidence of the Europeans' radical achievements had a lasting impact on American artists and succeeded in opening the cultural milieu to new ideas about the subjects and means of modern art.

The transatlantic influence of modernism was by no means one-way. Modernism's emphasis on subjective vision and its experimental outlook had roots in modernity itself, and the United States – prosperous at the beginning of the century and

unburdened by centuries of history – could lay unparalleled claim to a modern outlook. European artists, seeking refuge from the destruction of the First World War, delighted in the machine-age modernity of New York City with its skyscrapers and its emancipated women. (Francis Picabia created portraits in which he combined machine parts to represent individual personalities, while Duchamp, who had given up painting, found the material for his first ready-mades at hardware and plumbing stores.) Well before the Armory Show, American artists had travelled abroad, mainly to Paris, seeking both further artistic training and the stimulation of a more sophisticated cultural milieu. While in Germany at the outbreak of the war, Marsden Hartley painted sexually charged portraits of German officers, made up entirely of military insignia, which anticipate Picabia but reverse the cultural perspective. Around 1911, more theoretically oriented painters such as Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell fell under the spell of colour theory in Paris. Independently of Robert and Sonia Delaunay's orphism, they developed synchromism, an influential mode of colour painting in which line was suppressed and essentially figurative subjects were rendered through refracted planes of heightened colour.

Among the travellers was the man credited by Picabia as 'the best informed in this whole revolution in the arts', the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz who, well before the Armory show, had helped to create a receptive climate for modern art in New York (Greenough 2000: 32). Established in 1905, his Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, known as 291, became a forum for new ideas in photography and the visual arts. By 1913, he had presented the work of almost all the prominent European modernists featured in the Armory Show, often for the first time in America. Stieglitz also gathered around him a group of American modernists whose vision and originality he championed, including Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Arthur G. Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Demuth, and the photographer Paul Strand.

In spite of the privileged vantage point of such well-informed artists, the Armory Show and the First World War changed the landscape of artistic production in the United States. The formal advances of the Europeans, especially the cubists and Matisse, made American artists more conscious of structural issues in their own work, while the 'art for art's sake' perspective of the new movements called into question innate American assumptions that equated aesthetic values with moral values. By the second decade of the century, American modernists had rejected the demands of the Gilded Age that art be uplifting and detached from the realities of industrial America. In New York, wealthy new patrons such as Mabel Dodge and Walter and Louise Arensberg attracted artists and intellectuals to their salons, where the issues of the day, including Sigmund Freud's new theories of the unconscious, were discussed. Joining the expatriates Picabia and Duchamp during the war, Man Ray, Demuth, Hartley, and Charles Sheeler, among others, made the Arensberg's salon a centre of proto-dada activity, reflecting the 'disenchanted mood of American intellectuals' as the country prepared to enter the war (Rose 1975 [1967]: 77).

New York had been a favoured subject for painters since the beginning of the century. Now Marin and Joseph Stella, in their search for a language adequate to convey the experience of modernity, were using the fractured planes of cubism and futurism to convey the city's energy and vitality. Photographers such as Stieglitz abandoned pictorialism for 'straight' photography, embracing the medium's ability to transform the subject into abstract planes of light and shadow while maintaining

its identity. As Europe began its difficult recovery from the war in the 1920s, the United States entered the optimistic Jazz Age. Stuart Davis, one of the period's most accomplished painters, applied its rhythms to cubist compositions with a distinctively American flavour, while artists as diverse as Stella, Demuth, Sheeler, and Hartley, along with the photographers Strand and Berenice Abbott, engaged with the industrial landscape and the commercial vernacular of the city in their work.

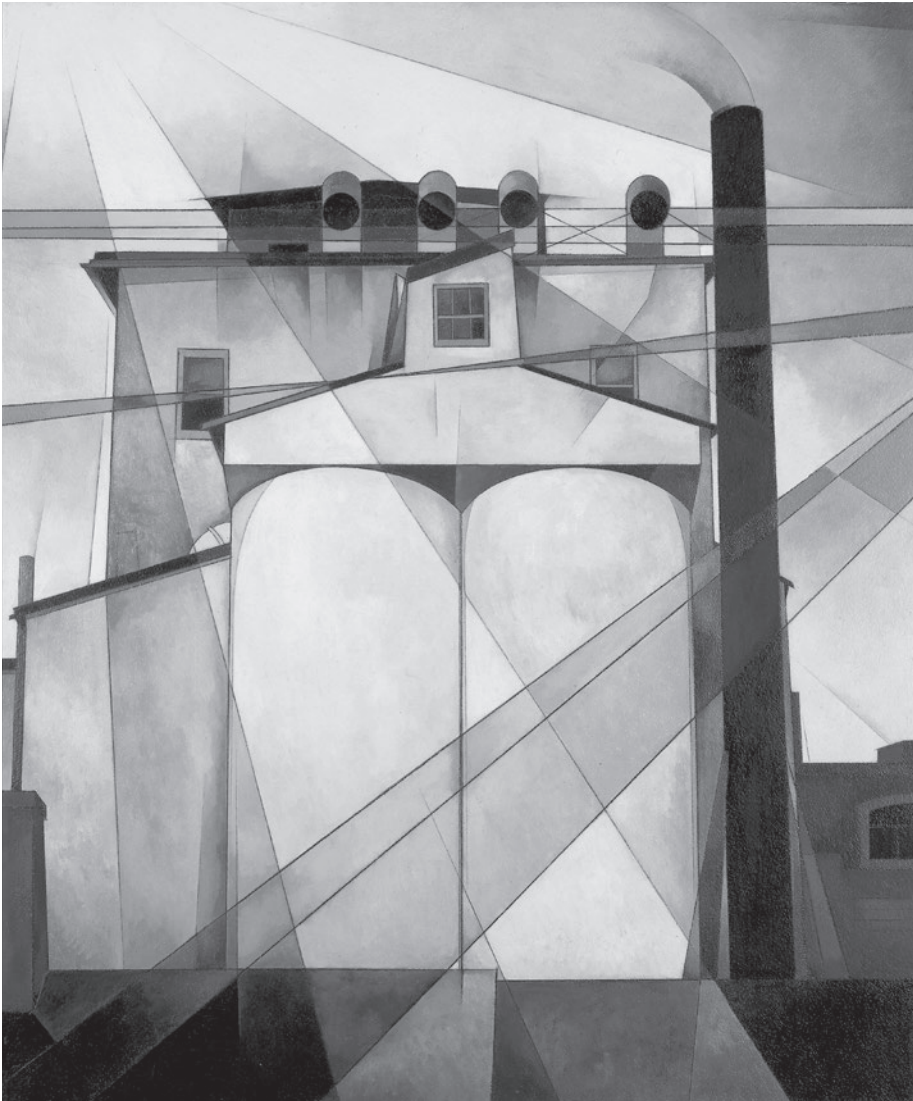


Figure 61.1 Charles Demuth (1883–1935), *My Egypt*, 1927.
Oil, fabricated chalk, and graphite pencil on composition board, 35 15/16 x 30 in.
(91.3 x 76.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
purchase, with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney # 31.172.
Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Many, however, felt the need to withdraw from the city's constant distractions. Earlier, Dove and O'Keeffe, drawing on their subjective responses to nature, had painted some of the earliest American abstractions. In the 1920s, O'Keeffe and Stieglitz spent half of each year in the country, where she created near-abstract paintings of flowers and other natural motifs, using the closely framed visual syntax of the camera to convey the essence of the subject. At the same time, Stieglitz produced his famous cloud studies, which he saw as equivalents for emotional states. Dove responded with his own paintings of clouds, seeking, as did Stieglitz and O'Keeffe, analogies with the abstract harmonies of music. Such analogies recalled late nineteenth-century notions of synaesthesia associated with symbolism, which had inspired Wassily Kandinsky's early abstractions. However, here they were tempered by a powerful engagement with nature and with place that continued to influence American modernism well into the twentieth century.

CANADIAN MODERNISM AND THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

Unlike the United States, in Canada no one metropolis dominated the artistic scene, acting as a magnet for artists like New York. Linguistically divided between French and English speakers, artistic activity in the early decades of the century was largely split between Toronto and Montreal, where some degree of institutional support could be found. The prevailing taste, however, was for academic painting, and for the most part ambitious artists encountered new ideas abroad. French art, especially Matisse and Albert Marquet, was the primary influence on the expatriate Montrealer James Wilson Morrice, who exhibited in Canada regularly as a member of the Canadian Art Club for the first two decades of the century. David Milne, another modernist, absorbed the lessons of post-impressionism in New York, where he lived from 1904 until 1916, and was sufficiently advanced to show five paintings in the Armory Show. The West Coast artist Emily Carr, who developed a highly coloured fauvist style following two years of study in Paris from 1910 to 1912, also followed this pattern of study abroad and subsequent isolation. With the exception of Carr, whose early subjects were aboriginal villages in the northern Haida Gwaii archipelago, and who later went on to seek the spiritual and formal sources of her highly original artistic vision in the Indigenous art of the West Coast, there is little that is distinctively Canadian about the work of these early modernists. Nor was modernity in the social sense a particular concern, other than in a couple of paintings of city streets lined with billboards that Milne painted while in New York.

Reflecting the optimistic nationalism of the period, the creation of a modern but distinctively Canadian style was a pressing concern for the artists who formed the Group of Seven – Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, Arthur Lismer, A.Y. Jackson, Frederick Varley, Franklin Carmichael, and Frank Johnston. Although they had some familiarity with modernist currents in painting, they were far from embracing the formalist aesthetics of the English critic Clive Bell, whose writings would have a lifelong impact on Milne. They found their shared subject in the rugged landscape of the Canadian north. Influenced by contemporary Scandinavian painting seen in a 1913 exhibition in Buffalo, they interpreted the landscape in a modern style of bold, simplified forms, heightened colour, and vigorous brushwork. Active as a group



Figure 61.2 Emily Carr, *Big Raven*, 1931, oil on canvas, 87 x 114 cm, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.11.

between 1920 and 1933, their interest in painting the unsettled landscape had begun almost a decade earlier when they began making sketching trips to Georgian Bay and Algonquin Park north of Toronto. By the time they dispersed they had travelled to most of the less-inhabited areas of the country and as far north as the eastern Arctic in their search for peculiarly Canadian subjects and had become known as Canada's national school.

More radical examples from abroad of modernist painting, stressing formal experimentation and the individual artist's subjective vision, did not reach Canada until 1927, via an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto from the collection of the New York Société Anonyme (founded by Katherine Dreier and Duchamp). Press reaction was predictably polarized, but several artists who saw the show (whose contents were considerably more advanced than the Armory Show's and included numerous examples of abstraction), were encouraged to continue their own formal experiments. Until then, cubism had had almost no purchase on Canadian artists and was regarded with suspicion by the Group of Seven and their supporters. This was not the case for Kathleen Munn, who had absorbed cubist and synchromist ideas of space and colour during her studies in New York in the preceding decade and who was aware of Kandinsky and Munich's Blaue Reiter artists. Her post-war figurative paintings are the first in Canada to demonstrate an understanding of cubist space, while her landscape-based abstractions show an original and dynamic understanding of form.

Munn's abstractions may have influenced those that her friend Bertram Brooker showed in the first exhibition of all-abstract paintings in Canada in 1927. A writer and self-taught artist, Brooker brought a philosophical cast of mind, a mystical perspective, and a strong interest in analogies to music and mathematics to his art. In what he called his 'world and spirit' paintings he sought 'a spiritual fourth dimension [...] through a geometrically based art' that would eventually lead to a 'cosmic consciousness' (Zemans 1989: 29). Although Brooker hoped to foster an appreciation of abstraction in his writing on the arts, there was little enthusiasm on the part of the wider artistic community or the critical establishment for such radical expressions of modernism. As Harris wrote in 1927, in his positive overall assessment of the Société Anonyme show, 'our way is not that of Europe, and, when we evolve abstractions, the approach, direction, and spirit will be somewhat different' (qtd. in Pfaff 1984: 95).

THE AGE OF ANXIETY: DEPRESSION, WAR, AND THE ASCENDENCY OF ABSTRACTION

The 1930s brought conflict and contradiction – social, political, and artistic – but sowed the ground for the full realization of modernist ideas in the 1940s and 1950s, when abstraction, supported by the major critical voices of the time, emerged as the most advanced form of artistic expression. Canada and the United States, which had been largely spared the terrible aftermath of the First World War that led to Europe's *rappel à l'ordre* in the 1920s, now experienced a crisis of values in response to the economic crisis of the Depression. The social climate was a severe challenge to the modernist emphasis on art's autonomy, which came under scrutiny from all sides.

After the mid-1930s in the United States, the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project provided welcome relief for modernist and conservative artists alike. The Project accorded social value to artistic labour and created an important sense of community, especially in New York. Modernists received support of another sort from the Museum of Modern Art's 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, which provided a broad overview of the modern movement's achievements in all media, although only three Americans, all expatriates, were included: the sculptor Alexander Calder; the painter Lionel Feininger; and the photographer Man Ray. As Irving Sandler notes, 'this show and its catalogue [...] were important in assembling before young abstract artists the visual sources and traditions out of which their own new styles were emerging' (Sandler 1970: 15).

The example and teaching of European émigrés such as Josef Albers, who introduced the Bauhaus curriculum at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, an important centre for the avant-garde, also had a significant impact, as did Hans Hofmann, whose school on Eighth Avenue in New York opened in 1934. Hofmann insisted that artists must master the laws of the expressive medium in order to give life to their intuitions of reality. According to Hofmann, these intuitions, given depth and plasticity by artists' empathetic response to the medium, form the spiritual or emotional content of the work of art (Chipp 1968: 541). Hofmann's teachings were particularly relevant, as they provided an important counterbalance to more shallow conceptions of cubist design.

No such support, either economic or ideological, existed for modernist artists in Canada, many of whom were cruelly affected by the Depression. In addition, Jackson of the Group of Seven actively spoke against international influences that undercut nationalist sentiment among younger artists. Only in Montreal were influential voices raised in favour of international trends and a 'subjective vision [...] expressed in plastic terms of design, colour, and structure' (Hill 1975: 11). This led to the founding in 1939 of the Contemporary Art Society, which in the 1940s would support a revolt that challenged both social and artistic conservatism.

In the meantime, interest in advanced ideas was confined to scattered pockets across the country. The work of German-born artist Fritz Brandtner, who settled first in Winnipeg and then Montreal, showed a mature understanding of cubist space and expressionist brushwork and colour. In Montreal, Marian Scott began to move from geometrically stylized figurative subjects to biomorphic semi-abstractions, inspired by the cellular world revealed by scientific research. For the landscape painter Harris, living in the United States in the mid-1930s, theosophy and transcendentalism guided his search for 'a more austere spiritual expression' and provided the springboards for his eventual leap into abstraction (Harris, qtd. in Nasgaard 2007: 34). Theosophy was also an influence on the Vancouver painter Jock Macdonald, whose abstract 'modalities' are decorative arrangements of symbolic geometric and organic forms that fall well short of his expressive intentions; it was not until the 1940s, with his introduction to surrealist automatist techniques, that his abstractions would begin to take on life.

Similar mystical tendencies could be found in the work of Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, West Coast painters influenced by Zen Buddhism, as well as in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the Transcendentalist Painting Group – which Harris had helped to found – worked until 1941. In New York, the majority of abstract painters were removed from such currents. Struggling for attention, they founded the American Abstract Artists (AAA) association in 1936 and held annual exhibitions of their work. The AAA was internationalist in its outlook; the work of its members reflected the purist, geometrical-abstract tendencies of the Paris avant-garde, which could be traced, via Piet Mondrian and the Bauhaus, to the cubists. For other advanced artists, critical of the derivative geometric abstraction of the AAA, the way forward lay in thoroughly assimilating the lessons in structure and colour that the work of Pablo Picasso and Matisse offered, while searching for an authentic content for their art.

The outbreak of the Second World War meant a turning point for American modernists. After two decades of looking to Europe for artistic leadership, artists found the centre of the international art world had shifted with the fall of Paris in 1940 and the influx of its leading figures, dominated by the surrealists, to New York. Even before the war, the presence in New York of David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, who used Indigenous Mexican myths and legends mixed with contemporary themes in their murals, provided an example of alternate traditions on which to draw. The situation gave the Americans confidence but at the same time instilled a deeper pessimism about the human condition. The crisis of war challenged the traditional spiritual and rational bases of progressive American society, and they were concerned to reconnect with the deep sources of shared experience.

Three influences were particularly transformative. In the early 1940s, Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and other figurative artists who rejected

realist modes (including the academic dreamscapes of Salvador Dalí and Yves Tanguy) found in surrealism's psychic automatism, based on Freudian free association, a method that stressed process over conscious planning and encouraged improvisation. Through his contact with the surrealists, Arshile Gorky loosened his handling of space and introduced semi-abstract, biomorphic images into his canvasses; more importantly, he found a way to express new, emotionally laden themes that gave new meaning to his late work. For Motherwell, automatism was a stimulus to formal invention, while for Pollock it was a means to explore the unconscious sources of his art. Surrealism's emphasis on the instinctual and acceptance of the accident thus opened avenues to more painterly expressiveness as well as to deeper, more personal subjects whose ambiguities suited the suggestive means of abstraction.

Equally important were Jungian ideas about the collective unconscious and the example of the formally expressive, non-descriptive art of the Indigenous peoples of the northwest and southwest as well as the Arctic. Carl Gustav Jung had stressed the enduring relevance of ancient myths, seeing in them archetypes and symbols for universal human fears and desires. A number of artists, including Pollock and Clifford Still – who had grown up in the West close to Indigenous tribes – as well as Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, identified the art of native North Americans with these archetypal forces and some, such as Pollock, began to incorporate totemic images as well as references to European mythology in their work. The Museum of Modern Art's 1941 exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* reinforced awareness of an ancient Indigenous American art that was still very much alive, albeit on the fringes of the contemporary world.

Out of these sources – emblematically represented by Pollock's hugely innovative drip paintings – came abstract expressionism, the first broadly influential American movement in the visual arts. Its ascendancy in the 1950s has obscured its origins in the alienation from and resistance felt by modernist American artists to mainstream American society. The work of the painters is usually broken into two streams, although the artists themselves did not acknowledge the separation. Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Motherwell, and Philip Guston are counted among the gesture painters; while Still, Newman, and Rothko are characterized as 'field' or 'colour-field' painters. Yet these distinctions are relative. During the breakthrough years of 1947–53, Still, Newman, and Rothko's fields of colour are palpably gestural, while Pollock's vast 'all-over' compositions, painted with the canvas on the floor rather than on an easel, are clearly 'fields'. More important is what they shared. Rejecting recognizable signs and symbols, they sought a direct, painterly expressiveness, accepting the raw or crude for its expressive power. Space was no longer a matter of cubist or geometric relational composition but an open, non-hierarchical field. Its relationships were with the world: the large scale of their paintings was intended to envelop the viewer, creating a paradoxical intimacy. Faced with the barbarous revelations of the war and the fear and reaction of the Cold War, artists turned inward to express the tragic and heroic dimensions of being: 'The self, terrible and constant, is for me the subject of painting', said Barnett Newman (qtd. in Sandler 2009: 95).

A less well-known – but fundamentally similar – alienation and resistance was experienced around the same time by a small group of French-speaking artists in Montreal who were called (and thereby identified by their surrealist sources) 'les Automatistes'. In 1948 the group issued a manifesto, entitled 'Refus global' ('Global

Refusal'), in which they attacked the right-wing Québec government and the intellectually repressive influence of the Catholic Church. But the Refus global was also a celebration of creative freedom, one that Paul-Émile Borduas, the leader of the group (which included Jean-Paul Riopelle among its members), had practised since the early 1940s in a series of abstractions based on surrealist automatism. Although Borduas' paintings – gestural marks floating in an ambiguous space – clearly derive their subject from landscape, paintings by the younger automatistes have an energetic, all-over quality reminiscent of the Americans', while seeking inspiration in their feelings for nature. Though not the earliest examples of abstraction in Canada, theirs was the first fully abstractionist movement there to identify its goals with rupture, one of the most fundamental modernist ideas.

In his important essay 'Three American painters', Michael Fried described the dialectic of modernist thought as 'an ideal of action as radical criticism of itself founded upon as objective an understanding of one's present situation as one is able to achieve' (1982 [1965]: 118). The situation as Fried saw it was one of inherent contradiction:

While modernist painting has increasingly divorced itself from the concerns of the society in which it precariously flourishes, the actual dialectic by which it is made has taken on more and more of the denseness, structure and complexity of moral experience – that is, of life itself, but life lived as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness.

(1982 [1965]: 119)

Not long after the ascendancy of abstract expressionism in the 1950s, artists began to turn away from the morally fraught subjectivity of modernism. In its place they embraced a materials-based objectivity, questioning the authority of the artist and engaging with modernity more pragmatically.

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